

# Close Combat Weapons in the Early 'Abbāsid Period: Maces, Axes and Swords\*

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GIVEN THE rarity of surviving examples of early medieval Islamic weaponry, with the notable exception of the collection of swords kept in the Topkapi and Military Museums in Istanbul, our knowledge of this field is principally derived from figurative and written sources.

Notwithstanding its inherent problems and limitations, figurative evidence was and remains the subject of knowledgeable, intensive and systematic investigation by contemporary research.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile written evidence, though more abundant, explicit and reliable, remains largely unexploited or even unexplored.

The core of the written evidence lies in *furūsiyya* literature, nearly all of which was written in Arabic. The greater part of this corpus of documentary sources remains unpublished, let alone translated. Furthermore, *furūsiyya* literature suffers from a chronic lack of specialized scholarly research and, consequently, from deep misunderstanding as well as an array of prejudices and misconceptions. One of the most common misconceptions is the assumption that *furūsiyya* literature emerged under the Ayyūbids in the late sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries because of the sweeping challenges posed by the Crusades, and that it reached maturity under the Mamlūks of Egypt and Syria from the later seventh/thirteenth to ninth/fifteenth century.

Apart from a lack of research, this wrong impression has been caused by the fact that the main corpus of surviving *furūsiyya* manuscripts is, in fact, from the Mamlūk period. However, careful examination of such manuscripts shows that original Mamlūk treatises constitute only one part of this literature. The other part consists of pre-Mamlūk, mainly 'Abbāsid treatises, copied and reused by the Mamlūks as manuals and as basic references. It also shows that the majority of Mamlūk *furūsiyya* treatises were themselves largely based upon 'Abbāsid *furūsiyya* literature and its sources.<sup>2</sup>

An inability to distinguish 'Abbāsid from Mamlūk treatises, to identify 'Abbāsid data within Mamlūk treatises, and to sort out its numerous sources (including Classical Greek, Sassanian and Byzantine), crippled research into *furūsiyya* literature from its inception. It also rendered the use of *furūsiyya* literature as written evidence a highly hazardous enterprise. Only

\* (Editor's note: Dates are written with the Islamic date preceding the Christian date)

<sup>1</sup> Pioneering work in this field continues to be undertaken by Dr. David Nicolle and Dr. Michael Gorelik: see the Bibliography at the end of this anthology.

<sup>2</sup> See Shihab al-Sarraf, *Adab al-furūsiyya fi'l-'aṣrayn al-'abbāsi wa'l-mamlūki* (henceforth, '*Furūsiyya* literature of the 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk periods') in Shihab al-Sarraf, ed., *Furūsiyya I* (Riyadh, 2000), pp. 104–39; Shihab al-Sarraf, '*Furūsiyya* literature of the Mamlūk period', in David Alexander, ed., *Furusiyya I* (Riyadh, 1996), pp. 118–35.



when the picture became clearer after many years of intensive research has it now become possible to safely utilize *furūsiyya* literature, which undoubtedly represents the finest source material for the study of Islamic warfare and military technology. This paper is a first attempt in this direction.

The term *furūsiyya*, literally though roughly meaning horsemanship, emerged as a concept and an institution under the 'Abbāsid Caliphate in Iraq during the latter half of the second/eighth century. It attained full currency during the third/ninth century when its conceptual and technical framework became well established and clearly defined. The activities covered by the term *furūsiyya* included equitation and horse mastery, training a horseman in the arts of the lance, handling close combat weapons, close combat techniques, foot and horse archery, hunting and polo. It also included both practical and theoretical knowledge of the basics of veterinary science, of the types and characteristics of weaponry, and of the art of war itself. The scope of *furūsiyya* was, logically, further extended to cover training, exercises and games performed on foot. *Furūsiyya* was, therefore, subdivided into 'upper *furūsiyya*' (*al-furūsiyya al-'ulwiyya*) which denoted activities performed on horseback, and 'lower *furūsiyya*' (*al-furūsiyya al-sufliyya*) which denoted those performed on foot.

The whole concept of 'Abbāsid *furūsiyya* was expounded in a third/ninth-century work written in Sāmarrā' and/or in Baghdad, by one of the commanders of the 'Abbāsid army and stable master of the Caliph al-Mu'taḍid. This was Ibn Akhī Hizām Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb al-Khuttālī who died around the end of the third/ninth century. He can be considered the founder of *furūsiyya* literature.

Ibn Akhī Hizām's work was written for the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (232–247/847–861) and it consisted of two complementary treatises written as manuals. These became the main source of future treatises and to a large extent determined the contents of *furūsiyya* literature. The first treatise covered equitation, hippology and farriery. The second treatise mainly dealt with the principles of riding and horse-mastery, lance and sword techniques, arms, archery and polo. These two treatises came down to us either combined as one work, though in two parts each with its own preface, or separately and bearing different titles. Most copies of the second treatise were either catalogued as anonymous or bore fictitious names. This is one reason why Ibn Akhī Hizām's second treatise, though essential for a proper understanding of Islamic *furūsiyya* literature as a whole, remained unrecognized as third ninth-century work.

Ibn Akhī Hizām was himself the descendant of a prominent family of *Abnā'*<sup>3</sup> who faithfully served the 'Abbāsid dynasty for several decades.<sup>4</sup> He was an experienced soldier, expert on horses, master of *furūsiyya* arts and unchallenged authority in lance and close combat techniques and weapons. Hence the unmatched importance of his work which represents the oldest surviving *furūsiyya* manual and is an extremely valuable testimony of a contemporary and highly authoritative figure in the 'Abbāsid military establishment.

<sup>3</sup> The term *Abnā'* (literally 'sons' or 'descendants') was originally used to denote the descendants of the first Khurāsānīs who brought the 'Abbāsid Caliphal dynasty to power and who were mostly Arab settlers in Khurāsān. But, as recruitment from Khurāsān continued, the term was used for the descendents of any first generation Khurāsānī recruits regardless of the time of their arrival in Iraq or their ethnic origin. The *Abnā'*, whether of Arab or Persian origin and whether they were descendents of early or later Khurāsānīs, had a great sense of unity and solidarity. Raised and trained according to the rules of 'Abbāsid *furūsiyya*, they constituted a redoubtable military force, serving both as cavalry and infantry. Their devotion to Iraq, Baghdad and the 'Abbāsid house was almost fanatical. Distinguished *Abnā'* may always have joined the Khurāsānī corps and have assumed positions of command, as was the case with Ibn Akhī Hizām.

<sup>4</sup> The uncle of Ibn Akhī Hizām was one of the most distinguished commanders of the Khurāsānī corps under the Caliph al-Mu'taḍid and was also his stable master. His name was Hizām Ibn Ghālib, whence the nickname Ibn Akhī Hizām which literally means 'the son of the brother of Hizām': see Shihab al-Sarraf, '*Furūsiyya* literature of the Mamlūk period', *op. cit.*, p. 120.



His second treatise, which will be exploited here for the first time, became the prototype of what can be called general *furūsiyya* treatises. These constitute one of the two basic categories of *furūsiyya* literature. Thematic treatises represent the other category; including treatises on equitation, hippology and farriery; on archery; on the arts of the lance; on the arts of the mace; on the art of war, on arms and war machines; on the chase and on polo.

Thematic *furūsiyya* works may be sub-divided into two types of treatises: comprehensive and specific thematic treatises. The former gives an overall treatment of the subject, while the latter deals only with a specific aspect of the subject matter. Concerning arms and armour, specific and comprehensive treatises were the objects of two kinds of contributions. The first was made by Arab linguists and philologists on the nomenclature and types of weaponry used by and known to the Arabs in pre- and proto-Islamic periods as attested mainly by Arab poetry, and contributions made by professionals and *furūsiyya* masters.

During the period from the second half of the second/eighth century to the first half of the fourth/tenth century, a great number of comprehensive and specific treatises on arms and armour and military technology were written in 'Abbāsid Iraq.<sup>5</sup> At this point in our research, no treatise of the comprehensive type is known to have survived.<sup>6</sup> However, considerable data from lost treatises can be found dispersed in other sources. Encyclopedic dictionaries and works of *adab* (belles lettres) conserved the greater part of what 'Abbāsid philologists wrote about the subject. Similarly contemporary and later general and thematic *furūsiyya* treatises contained important borrowings from comprehensive arms and armour treatises written by early 'Abbāsid specialists and *furūsiyya* masters.

As for specific treatises on arms and armour, only two survived from that period; namely al-Kindi's treatise on the types of swords<sup>7</sup> and his treatise on the composition, manufacture and quenching of steel blades.<sup>8</sup> Both treatises were written for the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (218–27/833–42). The first one is unique in its genre within *furūsiyya* literature. It was a remarkable field study as each type of blade described was also known and examined by al-Kindi himself who spent years frequenting sword smiths and investigating the sword markets of Baghdad, Baṣra and Sāmarrā'. This perhaps explains why there was no attempt to write something similar again. In fact al-Kindi's work remains definitely the most important source on swords in the entire medieval period.<sup>9</sup>

The second treatise, which was for a long time presumed lost, is no less important. Surely, al-Kindi was neither the first nor the last Muslim author to write on the making of steel, but his treatise is the only work which has survived. Moreover, while admitting that none of the thirty-five recipes which he mentioned was his own, al-Kindi assured the Caliph that he had critically tested each one of them. Al-Kindi was as brilliant an alchemist and metallurgist as he was a philosopher; so his second treatise therefore represents an extremely precious scientific testimony on this subject. The rudimentary and largely misleading existing edition of al-Kindi's first treatise, and the lack of a published version of his second – the existence of which is still widely ignored – have deprived modern researchers of a chance to make significant progress in this field. Notwithstanding notable contributions, a comprehensive study of medieval Islamic swords is still lacking. This is in spite of the fact that swords represent the only field within the overall subject of medieval Islamic arms and armour where we have massive literary, pictorial and material evidence covering all aspects of the subject, including its socio-economic, political and military dimensions.

This paper cannot itself dramatically alter the situation, as a full exploitation of the overall

<sup>5</sup> For more detail see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya literature of the 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk periods', *op. cit.*, pp. 118–21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.

<sup>7</sup> A.R. Zaki: see below and in the Bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> See Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya literature of the 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk periods', *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> For an analyses of the treatise see *ibid.*, p. 120.



literary evidence which I have systematically compiled from a wide range of sources is beyond the scope and purpose of the current contribution. Instead the main emphasis is here placed upon the practical and functional aspects of medieval Islamic swords as close combat weapons within the context of new cavalry tactics and highly sophisticated military training which were elaborated and synthesized during the early 'Abbāsid period. We are, for example, less concerned here with the types of swords in terms of their steel and methods of fabrication than we are with the thornier problem of their forms which had direct bearing on close combat techniques and cavalry tactics. In this respect, Ibn Akhī Hizām gave us invaluable and unique information which allows us to focus on such questions as the introduction and use of the sabre, the origins of the *qaljūrī* and *qilīc*, the role and importance of the double-edged straight sword, and so on. Apart from the styles of swords, the data provided by *furūsiyya* literature as well as a large variety of other sources on the practical and functional aspects of swords are so rich that, even in this limited domain, it became necessary for me to be arbitrarily selective in my choice of topics. Consequently I have focussed upon problems and aspects that have either not been treated before or which I felt needed to be further deepened or confirmed.

The importance accorded to the sword by the sources contrasts sharply with the meagre interest shown in maces and axes. This is despite the fact that the latter were considered, in theory and in practice, to be more effective than the sword against an armoured foe. Accordingly, data on maces and axes in *furūsiyya* literature is fragmentary and rather sparse. Here, the extensive use of other types of sources, which might contain important though scattered bits of information, was essential. It should be noted, however, that although the mass of evidence assembled in this article is the result of many years of research, it is neither an exhaustive nor definitive survey of the extant corpus of *furūsiyya* treatises and the more general body of the historical writings, the study of which remains an on-going process.

### Maces

(figs. XII-1-9 and XII-53-73)

There is no generic Arabic word for a mace but a number of terms, each denoting a specific type or category. In the 'Abbāsid period two basic and distinct types of mace were used. The first, commonly called *dabbūs* (pl. *dabābīs*), consisted of a wooden or iron haft with a head of iron or other solid material with different shapes. The second was a one-piece iron staff invariably called *'amūd* (pl. *'amad* or *'umud*). The terms *jurz* and *latt* will also be examined below. They are occasionally mentioned alongside the *'amūd* and the *dabbūs* respectively, and it is possible that they represent two intermediate styles.

The Arabic meaning of the word *'amūd* (literary pole, column or staff) already provides an idea of the weapon's form (fig. XII-45). It was a thick iron baton (*'aṣā ḥadīd*), usually without a separate head or with one which was actually made integrally with the handle, and it was both longer and considerably heavier than the *dabbūs*.

The longest type of *'amūd* was called *al-mustawfī*, and it measured two cubits,<sup>10</sup> that is about 100 cm in Iraqi measure (one Iraqi cubit = 49.875 cm) or 108.8 cm in Egyptian measure (one Egyptian cubit = 54.04 cm). In his account of the Fāṭimid New Year procession during the first half of the sixth/twelfth century, and in his description of the parade weapons carried on that occasion, Ibn al-Ṭuwayr (524-617/1130-1220) described the *mustawfiyāt* (pl. of *al-mustawfī*),

<sup>10</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr al-Qaysarānī, Abū Muḥammad al-Murtaḍā 'Abd al-Salām, *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (Beirut, 1992), p. 148. See also al-Qalqashandī, Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī al-Fazārī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā* (Cairo, 1912-1938), vol. III, p. 470.



as 'square-sectioned iron staves with round handles' (*'umud ḥadīd muraba'at al-'ashkāl bi-maqābiḍ mudawwara*).<sup>11</sup> They were carried by a selected number of *ṣibyān al-rikāb*<sup>12</sup> escorting the Fāṭimid sovereign.

However, there is no evidence that the *mustawfī*, which was a purely third/ninth-century 'Abbāsid development, was ever used by the Fāṭimids in war. In fact, at the time of the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt in 358/996 the *amūd* was already in decline as a close-combat cavalry weapon (see below). The last reference to the use of the *mustawfī* as a weapon dates to the first half of the fourth/tenth century. The author of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-darb* mentioned that the Ḥamdānid ruler Sayf al-Dawla (d. 356/966) was wielding a *mustawfī* when, in 333/944, he gave battle to the Ikhshīd ruler of Egypt Muḥammad Ibn Tughj (d. 334/946) at Qinnasrīn in Syria. During that battle Sayf al-Dawla used the weapon to kill Ma'ādh Ibn Sa'īd, the governor of the town of Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān.<sup>13</sup>

There are many instances of the deadly impact of the *'amūd*, and one powerful blow was almost always fatal. Indeed, because of its considerable weight, the *'amūd* could not be as easily manipulated as the much lighter *dabbūs* or sword. Consequently the *'amūd*-bearer often put all his strength into one decisive blow and made sure that this blow did not miss, otherwise he himself could be thrown seriously off balance. Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) mentioned a certain Kardawayh al-A'sar who, having lost his right arm, trained himself to fight with his left hand. He chose the *'amūd* as his unique close-combat weapon so that he could defeat an enemy with only one blow. Yet he could not afford to miss with such a blow, otherwise he would be thrown off his horse. According to Al-Jāḥiẓ, no one ever escaped his deadly *'amūd*.<sup>14</sup>

An idea of the devastating effect of a powerful *'amūd* blow can be gained from the testimony of Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Sindī<sup>15</sup> (first half of the third/ninth century) who saw Muḥammad Ibn Khālīd, an 'Abbāsid army commander and author of a lost work on arms and armour,<sup>16</sup> prostrate a war horse and topple its rider when his *'amūd* missed the enemy's head but hit the pommel of his saddle.<sup>17</sup> Another example was given by al-Ṭabarī who stated that when, in 76/698, the Khārijit leader Shibīb Ibn Yazīd (d. 77/696) entered Kūfa with his followers, he went to the palace of the governor and furiously struck its huge gate with his *'amūd* causing so much damage that the people of Kūfa subsequently went to see it.<sup>18</sup>

The *'amūd* of Shibīb, with which he killed a certain Muḥammad Ibn Mūsa Ibn Ṭalḥa with a single blow which smashed both helmet (*bayḍa*) and head, weighed 12 Syrian *ratls*, that is

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> *Ṣibyān al-rikāb* (pl. *Ṣabī al-rikāb*), literally: 'young men of the (royal or sovereign's) stirrup', were a special Fāṭimid royal corps of bodyguards who usually escorted the Fāṭimid sovereign on foot during parades and processions. Although their number grew to more than two thousand in the later Fāṭimid period, those among them who were entitled to carry arms during the processions remained relatively small. All their parade weapons came as a loan from the royal arsenal, and were restored to the arsenal immediately after the end of the ceremony. We do not know if they carried regular weapons during ordinary times as the sources furnish no data on this subject. See Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 124, 148 and 165; al-Qalqashandī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 480; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1967–1973), vol. II, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> Abū l-Fidā, al-Mu'ayyad Ismā'īl (attributed to), *Al-Yawāqīt wa-l-darb fī tārikh Ḥalab* (Aleppo, 1989), p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amrū Ibn Baḥr, *Kitāb al-Burṣān wa-l-'injān*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn (Baghdad, 1982), p. 405.

<sup>15</sup> Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Sindī was a close friend of al-Jāḥiẓ who considered him the greatest authority on the 'Abbāsid State in his time. His father was the well-known 'Abbāsid army commander al-Shāhik Ibn al-Sindī. See Ch. Pellat, 'Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Sindī', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1971), vol. III, p. 990.

<sup>16</sup> On Muḥammad Ibn Khālīd and his lost work from which al-Ṭarsūsī borrowed valuable extracts for use in his *Tabṣara*; see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya literature of the 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk periods', *op. cit.* (see note no. 5), pp. 117 and 120.

<sup>17</sup> See Anonymous, *Al-Makhzūn li arbāb al-funūn*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. 2826, fol. 43a, and (pseudo) Najm al-Dīn al-Aḥdab, *Kitāb al-furūsiyya wa-l-manāṣib al-ḥarbiyya*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. 2825, fols. 74a–b.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr, *Tārikh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* (Cairo, 1323/1905–6), vol. VII, p. 233.



22.2 kg (one Syrian *ratl* = 1850 g).<sup>19</sup> During one of his last encounters with the army of al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf, the Umayyad governor of Iraq (d. 95/714), Shibīb killed someone whom he thought to be Khālīd Ibn 'Atāb, the commander of the Umayyād right wing. On this occasion he used an 'amūd weighing 15 unspecified *ratls*.<sup>20</sup> When not specified in the documentary sources, *ratls* are usually taken to be Iraqi (one Iraqi *ratl* = 406.25 g). On the other hand the whole context suggests that these 15 *ratls* were Syrian, which would give a total weight of 27.750 kg. The 'amūd of al-Ḥārith Ibn Surayj (d. 128/745), a dissident Umayyad army commander in Khurāsān who was currently waging war against Transaxonians and Turks on his own account, was described as being even heavier. This weapon weighed 18 Syrian *ratls* (33.300 kg).<sup>21</sup> When, in 127/744, al-Ḥārith Ibn Surayj was asked by Waḍḍāh Ibn Ḥabīb<sup>22</sup> to show him his famous 'amūd, which the people in Iraq often mentioned for its extraordinary size and weight, Ibn Surayj answered that his 'amūd was similar in shape and weight to the 'amūds of his companions. The difference, he stated, was in the power of the blow.<sup>23</sup> However, these were exceptional weights, possibly exaggerated in the sources, for men of exceptional strength.

More realistic figures were given in *Kitāb al-Shāmil* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭabarī (first half of the third/ninth century). He stated that Aḥmad al-Sūrmādhī (early third/ninth century), a great archer and prominent member of the Khurāsānian corps of the 'Abbāsīd army, used to wield an 'amūd of 24 Iraqi *ratls* (about 10 kg), but when he became an old man Aḥmad al-Sūrmādhī used one weighing only 16 Iraqi *ratls* (6.5 kg).<sup>24</sup>

If we presume that 10 kg was a reasonable maximum weight for an 'amūd, with the minimum weight being around 4 to 5 kg, then the medium weight would therefore be 6 to 7 kg. These three figures probably represent the standard weights for an 'amūd during the 'Abbāsīd period. They are quite plausible for a weapon which, by its very nature, was meant to be ponderous and destructive.

There is no evidence that the 'amūd, which was an expensive weapon (see below) designed in response to the challenge of a heavy-armoured foe, was ever used by the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period of the *Jāhiliyya*, nor in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad himself. On the other hand, the 'amūd, which was called a *lakht* in Persian,<sup>25</sup> was part of the Sassanian cavalryman's equipment according to al-Dīnawarī (d. 282/894–5).<sup>26</sup> According to al-Ṭabarī, its use was optional as the Sassanian horseman had to choose between it and the *ṭabarzīn* war-axe. As for the *jurz* (see below), this was kept in his belt and should be carried anyway.<sup>27</sup> Carrying an 'amūd while attending the ruler was also part of Sassanian palace ceremonial.<sup>28</sup>

The earliest reference to the use of the 'amūd by Muslims dates from the period of the Caliphate of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (35–40/656–661). Al-Dīnawarī, followed by al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957), made a passing mention of the 'amūd being amongst the weapons used during the battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657) between the Caliph 'Alī and Mu'āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680). On this occasion both parties were heavily armoured.<sup>29</sup> However this evidence, though

<sup>19</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. VII, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IX, p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> The envoy of the Umayyād governor of Iraq 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar to Naṣr Ibn Sayyār, the governor of Khurasān. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. IX, pp. 52–3.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. LX, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-shāmil fī'l-ramī*, British Library, inv. no. Or.9265/1, fol. 2a.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Al-Maydānī, Abū l-Faḍl al-Nīsābūrī, *Al-Sāmī fī'l-'asāmī*, ed. M.M. al-Hindāwī (Cairo, 1967), p. 224.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Dīnawarī, Abū Ḥanīfa Aḥmad Ibn Dāwūd, *Al-Akhhār al-Ṭiwāl*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Āmir (Cairo, 1959), p. 73.



plausible, is not corroborated by other sources which give a more detailed description of the battle of Šiffīn.

There are a number of references to the *'amūd* during the Umayyād period (41–132/661–750), in the first decade of which the governor of Iraq, Ziyād Ibn Abīh (d. 53/673), created a unit of special escort-guards who were distinctively attired, carrying *'amūds* and javelins.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the sword remained the primary and often the unique close-combat weapon during this period. Use of the *'amūd* was sporadic and limited, and it seems that it never became a regular item of equipment for Umayyād cavalry. In his letter to 'Abdallāh, the son and heir of Marwān Ibn Muḥammad the last of the Umayyād caliphs, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib gave a detailed description of an Umayyād horseman's weaponry. Neither the *'amūd* nor the *dabbūs* were mentioned.<sup>31</sup>

With the advent of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate, the *'amūd* can be clearly recognized as a cavalry weapon, especially from the end of the second/eighth century onwards. A fragment of a largely lost third/ninth-century 'Abbāsid *furūsiyya* treatise described the *'amūd* as:

... the most important weapon in war in all times and situations. It is among weapons like a lion among animals, and all people acknowledge its virtue and prefer it to other [close-combat] weapons because no other arm can replace it.

The anonymous author confirmed, however, that 'the use of an *'amūd* needs a combination of great physical strength, sturdiness, dexterity and agility'. He also insisted that the *'amūd*-bearer must be stronger than his *'amūd* so as to enable him to perfect his mastery of this weapon. As for the functions of an *'amūd*, which should be carried attached to the saddle close to the horseman's right knee, these included targeting the enemy's body, breaking his lance and his sword. If, during the combat, the horseman wanted to alternate his *'amūd* with other weapons – namely the lance and the bow – he could place the *'amūd* horizontally between his body and the pommel of his saddle or he could put it back in its holder or sheath. Finally, the author categorically stated that 'if a horseman prefers other arms to the *'amūd*, this only means that he does not want to cause the death of his opponent'.<sup>32</sup>

This unqualified statement may give the impression that the *'amūd* was widely used by 'Abbāsid cavalry and was at the disposal of any horseman capable of wielding it. Yet this was far from being the case. Given the large quantity of iron needed to make one *'amūd*, even of minimum weight, and the relative scarcity of rich iron ores in the eastern Arab areas,<sup>33</sup> the *'amūd* was doubtless a very costly weapon accessible only to those who could afford it. Indeed the whole body of evidence shows that the *'amūd* was mainly the privilege of the rich military and political élite. Most references to its use are associated with caliphs, army commanders, high ranking officers, notable *dāriyya* (caliphal palace) *ghilmāns*,<sup>34</sup> the cream of the *shākirīyya*

<sup>30</sup> Al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad Ibn Yahyā, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, ed. M. Schloessinger (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. IVA, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, *Risāla fī naṣīḥat walī al-'ahd*, in *Rasā'il al-bulaghā*, ed. M. Kurd 'Alī (Cairo, 1913), pp. 80–7.

<sup>32</sup> (Pseudo) Najm al-Dīn al-Aḥdab, *Kitāb al-furūsiyya wa'l-manāṣib al-ḥarbiyya*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. Ar. 2825, fols. 74a–b.

<sup>33</sup> See M. Lombard, *Les métaux dans l'ancien monde du Ve au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1974), pp. 162–73. See also article 'Ma'dīn', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1986), vol. V, pp. 968–71.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-ghilmān al-dāriyya* (pl. *ghulām dāriyya*) represent an élite corps permanently residing in the *dār al-khilāfa* (the 'Abbāsid palatial compound) which is often referred to simply as *al-Dār* (the house); hence the term *al-dāriyya*. The term was also used in contrast to *al-ghilmān al-barrāniyya* (the outdoor *ghilmān*; i.e. those who did not reside in the *Dār*). According to Hilāl al-Ṣābī, the number of *al-ghilmān al-dāriyya* reached 20,000 during the caliphate of al-Muktafi, (289–295/902–908) (Al-Ṣābī, Hilāl, *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*, ed. M. 'Awwād [Beirut, 1406/1986], p. 8). However it seems, at least in this particular context, that the expression *ghilmān dāriyya* was used as synonymous with *al-ghilmān al-ḥujariyya*, who were also called *ghilmān al-dār*. Although we do not have enough data to determine whether *al-dāriyya* and *al-ḥujariyya* were two distinct corps of *ghilmān*, we do know for certain that, after the disintegration of *al-ḥujariyya* in the second quarter of the fourth/tenth century, the expression *ghilmān dāriyya* continued to be used until at least the fifth/eleventh century.



troops<sup>35</sup> and privileged *ghilmān* divisions such as *al-hujariyya*<sup>36</sup> and *al-ṣājiyya*.<sup>37</sup> The armament of *shākiriyya* and *ghilmān* was usually provided by the caliphal arsenal (*Khizānat al-silāh*) and/or by the masters of such *shākiriyya* and *ghilmān* soldiers. Meanwhile the *murtazaqa* (the salaried professional troops paid from *Dīwān al-Jaysh* or 'the Ministry of War'), who constituted the bulk of the 'Abbāsid army, generally had to provide their own equipment. Among the best equipped and well paid *murtazaqa* were the *Khurāsānīs* whose rank and file vaunted their wooden clubs; the famous *kāfir-kūbāt* (pl. of *kāfir-kūb*).<sup>38</sup> These, though they could be quite effective, were surely less costly than a well made *dabbūs* let alone an *'amūd*.

The use of the *'amūd* became more precarious when, from the early third/ninth century onwards, both the *ṭabarzīn* and the *dabbūs* were firmly adopted as integral elements of the *shākiri*'s and *ghulām*'s military equipment. Nevertheless, the use of an *'amūd* as a cavalry weapon remained a reality during the third/ninth century which represented, in fact, its golden age. The decline and fragmentation of the caliphate, and the consequent collapse of its

<sup>35</sup> *Al-Shākiriyya* (pl. of *shākiri*) were another élite corps composed of elements whose ethnic origins and social status are not very clear. Their allegiance normally went to their master, be it the caliph or someone else. The strong bond of loyalty between them and their master and their absolute devotion to him is a matter for reflection. They were somewhat of a midway between *ghilmān* and professional soldiers. Perhaps they constituted a mixture of servants, followers and clients. These qualities anyway constituted the different meanings of the Persian word *chākīr* from which the term *shākiri* is derived. The *shākiriyya* were mainly well equipped and trained mounted archers. They were distinctively dressed, as can be inferred from al-Jāhiz in his *Manāqib al-Turk*. Their number increased considerably during the period of Caliph al-Mutawakkil who wanted to make them his main force, thus countering the hegemony of the Turkish troops and their commanders. This attempt perhaps hastened al-Mutawakkil's assassination by the latter.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Hujariyya* or *ghilmān al-hujar*, were the most distinguished *ghilmān* élite in the second half of the third/ninth century and the first quarter of the fourth/tenth century. The corps was founded as an élite caliphal force by the Caliph al-Mu'taḍid soon after his accession to power. The *hujariyya* were also referred to as *ghilmān al-dār* (see note 34 above). They were raised, educated and trained within the palatial compound where they were permanently housed in special quarters or chambers, the *hujar*; hence their name. During their formation period the *hujariyya* were not allowed to go beyond this palatial compound unless accompanied by their supervisors and *furūsiyya* masters. As soldiers they were superbly trained and equipped, also being given the highest salaries among *ghilmān* troops. Their number was often said to be many thousands, but there is evidence that their true numbers did not exceed 20,000 at any one time. However, they remained as a local force and did not take part in expeditions outside Iraq. Their political role grew with time and culminated in the installation of the Caliph al-Rāḍī in 322/934 with the participation of *al-ṣājiyya*. However this political role brought about their destruction in 325/936-7. The 'Abbāsid *hujariyya* corps was the forerunner of the later royal Mamlūk corps of the Mamlūk Sultanate. The 'Abbāsid term *hujar* became, in fact, the Mamlūk *ṭibāq* and the expression *mamālīk al-ṭibāq* could be literally rendered as *ghilmān al-hujar*. The system of *al-hujariyya*, which was probably introduced to Egypt during the Ikshīdīd period, was adopted along with all its associated terminology by the Fāṭimid Caliphate as early as the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, though only on a very modest level. In the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century the Fāṭimid vizier al-Afdāl tried to create a strong corps of *hujariyya*. However this later Fāṭimid *hujariyya* corps, the number of which ranged between three thousand and five thousand, did not play any significant military role, even as a local force.

<sup>37</sup> *Al-Ṣājiyya* corps was the second most important *ghilmān* élite corps after the *hujariyya* during the second half of the third/ninth century and the first quarter of the fourth/tenth century. Its name was derived from the name of its founder, the 'Abbāsid Turkish commander *Abū'l-Ṣāj Dīyūdādh* (d. 226/880). The *Ṣājiyya* became involved in palace intrigues during the second decade of the fourth/tenth century. They also took an active role, with the *hujariyya*, in the demise of the Caliph al-Qāhir and the installation of al-Rāḍī as Caliph. Their commanders were all executed in 324/963 and the corps was dispersed.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Jāhiz, 'Manāqib al-Turk', in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. A.M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1964-79), vol. I, p. 20; Al-Dīnawarī, *op. cit.*, p. 361. The term *kāfir-kūb* is composed of two words: the Arab word *kāfir* meaning infidel, and the Persian *kob* meaning scourge. Thus the total meaning of the term is the 'scourge of the infidel'. According to al-Dīnawarī, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, the term was first used by the *Khurāsānīs* during the 'Abbāsid revolution. He claimed that, before marching to Iraq, they covered their wooden maces with black paint and called them *kāfir-kūbāt*. However, other sources associate the term with the followers of al-Mukhtār Ibn Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqafī (d. 67/68) who vowed vengeance for the killing of al-Husayn Ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib and his family by the Umayyāds. He controlled Iraq for a while. The *kāfir-kūbāt* were the principal arm of his followers who were thus called *al-khashabiyya*; i.e. those who use wooden maces.



worldwide trade in armaments, iron and steel, brought to an end the use of the *'amūd* as an élite weapon.

During the first half of the fourth/tenth century references to the *'amūd* became quite scarce and had completely disappeared by the end of that century. Meanwhile two important developments had taken place. These were the emergence of the heavy *latt* mace (see below) and the habit of carrying a *dabbūs* or *latt* in war attached to the saddle instead of being thrust into the belt (see below). By the time al-Ṭarsūsī wrote his famous treatise *al-Tabṣira* for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin, d. 589/1193), the *'amūd* had already become obsolete. In his chapter on maces, including the *latt*, *dabbūs* and *'amūd*, al-Ṭarsūsī drew upon earlier sources. Where the *'amūd* was concerned he merely stated that 'it is entirely made of iron and is far more effective than the *dabbūs* and other similar studded weapons'.<sup>39</sup> He then offered some verses which had been engraved on three *'amūds*. One belonged to the Umayyād governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf; another had belonged to an 'Abbāsid caliph while the third belonged to a son of the Ikhshīd ruler of Egypt.<sup>40</sup> The rest of al-Ṭarsūsī's text on the development on maces was entirely devoted to the *dabbūs* which, by then, denoted both light and heavy studded maces with various forms of head.

It is important to emphasize that the *'amūd* was known only by name, through 'Abbāsid and Fātimid sources, to the subsequent Mamlūks of Egypt and Syria. Some authors, such as al-Qalqashandī, even confused it with the *dabbūs* and thought that these weapons were synonymous.<sup>41</sup> All the precious though scanty data on the *'amūd* which is found in Mamlūk *Furūsiyya* treatises actually dates from much earlier, from the third/ninth century. It had been borrowed from early or later lost 'Abbāsid *furūsiyya* treatises such as those of Muḥammad Ibn Khālid (see above) and Ṣābir al-Manjanīqī (d. 620/1220).<sup>42</sup> In his *furūsiyya* treatise entitled *Nihāyat al-sūl*, al-Aqsarā'ī (d. 749/1348), drew upon various 'Abbāsid sources,<sup>43</sup> and devoted a chapter of one folio to the *'amūd*.<sup>44</sup> He then concluded this chapter by mentioning that a frontier (*thughūr*) warrior once told him that the *'amūd* weighed 150 *dirhams* and that it was preferable to have one that was even lighter.<sup>45</sup> 150 *dirhams* was equivalent to about 0.5 kg, which was not even a third of the weight of a light *dabbūs* mace. This clearly indicates that al-Aqsarā'ī had not only never seen a real *'amūd* but that he did not have the slightest notion about its real functions.

As for the late Mamlūk weapon called *al-ghaddāra*, which was again carried attached to the saddle, this was prohibited by Sultan al-Ghūrī in 918/1512 after one Mamlūk had used it to chop off the hand of another.<sup>46</sup> It was definitely not a 'steel staff' as Mayer thought.<sup>47</sup> Apparently Mayer had relied on dubious information from Dozy who himself had loosely quoted from a nineteenth century French-Arabic vulgar dictionary.<sup>48</sup> Instead it is almost certain that the Mamlūk *ghaddāra* was a sort of small double-edged sword, much like the Georgian *qāma*, the Caucasian *kindjāl* or the Persian *qaddāra* which was itself probably a corruption of the word *ghaddāra*.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Ṭarsūsī, Mardī Ibn 'Alī, *Tabṣirat arbāb al-albāb*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, inv. no. Hunt. 264, fol. 121a.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Ṭarsūsī, *op. cit.*, fols. 121a-b.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Qalqashandī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Author of the monumental work *Umdat al-sālik fī siyāsāt al-mamālik*; see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya literature of the Mamlūk Period', *op. cit.*, p. 130; and Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya literature of the 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk periods', *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> For an analysis of *Nihāyat al-sūl* and its 'Abbāsid sources see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya Literature of the Mamlūk Period', *op. cit.*, pp. 128-130.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Aqsarā'ī, Tsā Ibn Ismā'īl al-Ḥanafī, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, British Library, inv. no. Add. 18866, fols. 152b-153a.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Aqsarā'ī, *op. cit.*, fol. 153a.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn 'Iyas, Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, ed. M. Mustafa (Cairo, 1960-75), vol. IV, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. L.A. Mayer, *Mamluk Customs* (Geneva, 1952), p. 47.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 3rd edn. (Leiden-Paris, 1967), vol. II, p. 202.



Because of its form, the material from which it was made and its prestige as an élite weapon, the *'amūd* probably received particular attention in terms of decoration. This included inscriptions such as the verses quoted by al-Ṭarsūsī. There are also accounts of gilded *'amūds* being carried by 'Abbāsīd *ghilmāns* during parades and ceremonies,<sup>49</sup> and even of *'amūds* made entirely of gold.<sup>50</sup> Some gold *'amūds* were supposedly encrusted with jewels.<sup>51</sup> However, to the best of our knowledge there are neither surviving examples of, nor clear pictorial representations of, *'amūds*. (Editor's note: Early illustrations of what might be maces, and might even be *'amūds*, are so highly stylized that their identification remains questionable; figs. XII-5, XII-51-52, XII-55 and XII-56.) Although most early 'Abbāsīd weapons share these problems, there are other factors which may explain the complete lack of archaeological evidence for the *'amūd*. These are the relatively restricted use of the *'amūd*, the short time span during which it was used in the early Islamic period, and the fact that it was made of a large quantity of steel or iron. Once such a weapon was no longer required, this valuable material could be readily recycled to make a number of other more immediately needed weapons. For example, from one *'amūd* of minimum weight, two heavy swords and two daggers or several *dabbūs*-heads could be forged.

The origin of the word *dabbūs* is still to be determined. According to the *Qāmūs* the term was of Persian origin.<sup>52</sup> However, it does not exist in modern Persian as spoken since the Umayyād period. In fact the word probably entered Persian from Arabic in the early second/eighth century. In his *Fiqh al-lughā*, al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/1038) included the word *dabbūs* in a chapter entitled 'words spoken and used in Arabic while forgotten in Persian'.<sup>53</sup> Here he listed numerous Arabic terms which had been adopted virtually unchanged by the Persians because of a lack of equivalent Persian terms. The general Persian word for a mace is *gurz*. This is equivalent to the Arabic term *maqma'a*, though the latter mainly exists in philological essays and which, with one significant exception which will be mentioned later, has no historical presence in literary sources.

Basically round-headed maces were used in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, long before the medieval and Islamic periods. In Mesopotamia, the most common and popular type of mace survived until modern times. It consists of a baton with a head made of bitumen and was known in 'Abbāsīd Iraq as an *'asā muqayyara*,<sup>54</sup> or merely *al-muqayyara* (from *qīr*, meaning bitumen) (fig. XII-48). It was also known as *muqyār* which was corrupted to the modern Iraqi Arabic vernacular word *mugwār*. The pre-Islamic Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya* period also probably knew this same type, or other similarly rudimentary maces. Yet the term *dabbūs* itself only clearly emerged under the 'Abbāsīds in the second half of the second/eighth century, and there is no evidence that the word was used by the Arabs in the pre-Islamic, early Islamic or Umayyād periods.

The early 'Abbāsīd *dabbūs* denoted a specific type of mace. This was a light type with a round or oval head (figs. XII-2, XII-49, XII-50 and XII-54); the former called *dabbūs mudawwar* being the most common. The Sassanian *gurz* was, therefore, not necessarily equivalent to the early 'Abbāsīd *dabbūs*, either in terms of its shape or its weight. Furthermore it is worth noting that in their descriptions of a Sassanian horseman's equipment, both al-Dīnawarī and al-Ṭabarī used the term *jurz* for a mace which was carried in the belt. Arab linguists and philologists

<sup>49</sup> Ibn al-Zubayr, *op. cit.*, pp. 128 and 145.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 255.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn al-Zubayr, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. al-Firūzabādī, Abū'l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* (Cairo, Būlāq, 1272/1855), article on 'Dabas'.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Tha'ālibī, Abū Maṣ'ūr, *Fiqh al-lughā* (Paris, 1861), p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Bayhaqī, Ibrāhīm Ibn Muḥsin, *al-Maḥāsīn wa'l-masāwī* (Cairo, 1906), vol. II, p. 143; cf. also Al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Bukhālā'*, ed. Ṭāha al-Ḥājirī (Cairo, 1948), p. 231.



unanimously agree that the term *jurz* (pl. *jiraza*) is a purely Arabic word meaning, amongst other things, hard, solid, strong and thick. It could be used to describe a man, a camel or a sword but was above all synonymous with *'amūd al-ḥadīd* (the iron staff) rather than the mace.<sup>55</sup>

However, irrespective of the origins of the term *jurz*, al-Ṭabarī usually drew a clear distinction between the *'amūd*, the *dabbūs*, and the *jurz*, using the latter in the sense of a knobbed mace entirely made of iron which was most probably what the Persian *gurz* also represented. Some later *furūsiyya* treatises, drawing upon early 'Abbāsīd sources, equated the Persian *gurz* with the toothed *latt* meaning a heavy mace (see below) saying that, at the time of the Sassanian Persian Emperor Khīsrū Anū Shirwān (531–579), the Persians demonstrated their power through having ten thousand mounted *pahlawān* (heroes) brandishing toothed *latts*<sup>56</sup> (fig. XII–3). Under the Umayyāds, the *jurz* was mainly used, along with the *'amūd*, by some caliphal guards,<sup>57</sup> while in Khurāsān it was used as a real combat weapon.<sup>58</sup> The use of the *jurz* was recorded at the very beginning of the 'Abbāsīd period, namely during the caliphate of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr (163–158/754–775).<sup>59</sup> He was also the first 'Abbāsīd caliph to introduce the custom of always keeping an *'amūd* ready at hand.<sup>60</sup> The term *jurz* then disappeared some time in the second half of the second/eighth century.

One of the earliest references to a *dabbūs* is found in a statement attributed to the 'Abbāsīd Sughdian commander al-Afshīn (d. 226/841) who came from the region of Sughd in Transoxania, in what is now Uzbekistan (fig. XII–2). He was accused of denigrating the Arabs by saying that they could be dealt with easily by use of the *dabbūs*.<sup>61</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ was among the foremost of those authors who reported this remark in his *Kitāb al-'Aṣā* which forms part of his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*.<sup>62</sup> This was, however, the first and only time that the term *dabbūs* was mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ, at least in his surviving works. He explained the term by comparing it to the wooden baton with a knobbed head (*mu'ajara-t al-ra's*) which was habitually carried by the people of Medina.<sup>63</sup> The fact that he found it necessary to explain the word, which is otherwise quite an unusual habit in his writings, indicated that the *dabbūs* as a term denoting a specific type of mace was not widely known nor widely used by the 'Abbāsīd army.

Most references to the use of the *dabbūs* from early the third/ninth century onwards were associated with *ghilmān* troops. In fact the emergence of their institution, based upon the recruitment of men of slave origin under al-Mu'taṣim (218–27/833–42), coincided remarkably closely with the appearance of the term *dabbūs* in the documentary sources. By the time this institution reached full maturity under the Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (279–89/892–902), the

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Ibn Durayd Abū Bakr Muḥammad, *Jamharat al-lughā*, ed. R.M. Baḥabakkī (Beirut, 1987–8), vol. I, p. 455; al-Azharī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad, *Tahdhīb al-lughā* (Cairo, 1964–7), vol. X, pp. 607–10; Ibn Sīda, Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī, *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ fi'l-lughā* (Cairo, Būlāq, AH 1316 /AD 1898), vol. VI, p. 98. It is said, according to al-Tha'libī, *op. cit.*, p. 132, that the terms *al-qahẓana* and *al-mirzaba*, which usually stand for a thick wooden baton, could denote iron staves. However, this is a minority view which is not fully supported even by al-Tha'libī himself.

<sup>56</sup> Sayf al-Dīn Ṭuqūz (attributed), *Kitāb 'ilm al-furūsiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, inv. no. 82 *Furūsiyya* Taymūr, fol. 65a; Cf. also al-Ḥamawī, Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī, *al-Nafahāt al-miskiyya fi ṣinā'at al-furūsiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Sattār al-Qaraghullī (Baghdad, 1950), p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. VIII, p. 82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270, vol. IX, p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IX, p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IX, p. 295. The *'amūd* was usually put between two cushions of the caliph's seat at his left side, but some caliphs used a sword instead while al-Qāhir (320–322/932–934) used a heavy javelin. See al-Mas'ūdī, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 200.

<sup>61</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh . . .*, *op. cit.*, vol. X, p. 367.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (Cairo, 1932), vol. III, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



*dabbūs* had become a permanent feature of *ghilmān* military equipment. During this period such soldiers used to carry it in their belts, whether in war or in peace, on military expeditions or during daily life, mounted or on foot. Although we have no direct information regarding its weight, there is enough evidence to show that, until the first decades of the fourth/tenth century, the commonly used *dabbūs* was of a light type. Indeed there is not one single account where somebody was killed or fatally injured by a *dabbūs*, even when unarmoured. In fact there are significant instances where a person who had been attacked by a number of *dabbūs*-bearers emerged without fatal injuries. Consequently, and in contrast to later periods when it became a heavier weapon, the *dabbūs* played only a minor role in close-combat. Here it was of less importance than were the *‘amūd*, the sword and the *ṭabarzīn*.

As already stated, the round headed *dabbūs* (*al-dabbūs al-mudawwar*) was the most common form; hence the use of the term *khirza* (lit. bead) as a generic term for the head of the *dabbūs* (*khirzat al-dabbūs*). The round head could be either plain or toothed (*mudarras*) or spiked (*mukawkab*) or flanged (*musayyaf*) (figs. XII-59, XII-61, XII-63 and XII-64). But the fact that such an expression as ‘round *dabbūs*’ existed, implies that other forms were used. The cucumber-like head was most probably also used. In later centuries, especially the Mamlūk period, the oval and cucumber-shaped forms predominated and the generic term for the head of a *dabbūs* became *khyāra-t* (lit. cucumber) *al-dabbūs*<sup>64</sup> (figs. XII-4, XII-59, XII-66 and XII-67).

In the early decades of the fourth/tenth century there was a turning point in the evolution of the *dabbūs*. This was when, for the first time in ‘Abbāsīd chronicles, the term *latt* (pl. *lutūt*) appeared. The word is derived from the Arab verb *latta* meaning the act of smashing or pounding.<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr described the *latt* as a mace with a head of elongated teeth mounted on an iron or wooden haft covered with red or black shagreen.<sup>66</sup> He distinguished it from the *dabbūs* on the basis that the latter had a round rather than elongated toothed head. However, this was a minor difference which could be quite misleading as a *dabbūs* could have a head of different forms yet still be called a *dabbūs*. The real difference between them lay in the weight and size of these respective heads. The head of the *latt* was bigger and much heavier than that of the *dabbūs*. In fact the *latt* may be defined as an oversized and heavy *dabbūs*. It represented a purely ‘Abbāsīd development and was, perhaps, originally conceived as a medium weight type between the light *dabbūs* and the heavy *‘amūd*.

In the second half of the fourth/tenth century the *latt* completely replaced the *‘amūd*. So it was that a mace emerged which, though no less effective than the *‘amūd*, was more widely used, less costly and easier to handle. During this period references to the *latt* in Buwayhid Iraq show that it became a principal weapon in close combat and was especially widely used by Turkish *murtazaqa* and *ghilmān*.<sup>67</sup> Like the *‘amūd*, the *latt* could also be excessively heavy as, for example, was the *latt* of the Turkish commander *Bānjūtakīn*.<sup>68</sup> It was probably some time during this period that the *latt* and the *dabbūs* started to be carried attached to the saddle during military expeditions.

In the fifth/eleventh century the borderline between the *latt* and the *dabbūs* became increasingly uncertain and the terms were often used synonymously. This may not only

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g. Baktūt al-Rammāh, al-Khāzindārī al-Dāhirī, *Kitāb al-Furūsiyya*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. Ar. 2830/1, fol. 46b.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Article ‘*lataf*’ in al-Fīrūzabādī, *op. cit.*, al-Azharī, *op. cit.*, and Ibn Manṣūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Cairo, Būlāq ed. 1300–1307/1882–1889).

<sup>66</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 164, 306, 381 and 391; Abū Shujā‘ al-Rudhrāwarī, Zahr al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Dhayl tajārūb al-umam*, ed. H.F. Amedroz and D.S. Margoliouth (Cairo, 1916), p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 391.



indicate that the *dabbūs* was itself getting heavier, but also that it was imposing itself as a generic term for studded maces, irrespective of their weight and the forms of their heads. This tendency was confirmed in the sixth/twelfth century when the term *dabbūs* predominated while the term *latt* steadily fell into disuse.

The predominance of the *dabbūs* in this century is best illustrated by the decision of Sayf al-Dīn Ghāzī Ibn Atābik Imād al-Dīn Zankī of Mosul (d. 544/1149) who ordered his army to carry a *dabbūs* attached to their saddles in all circumstances and not only during military expeditions as had been customary<sup>69</sup> (figs. XII-57, XII-60 and XII-69-73). According to Ibn al-Athīr this ordinance henceforth became an established rule as other Muslim rulers followed the example of Sayf al-Dīn.<sup>70</sup> The marginalization of the term *latt* and the preponderance of the term *dabbūs* are also confirmed in *al-Ṭabṣira*. In his above-mentioned chapter on maces, al-Ṭarsūsī made no distinction between the *latt* (which only nominally figures in the title) and the *dabbūs*, to which he devoted the bulk of his argument.<sup>71</sup> In another contemporary work written for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, namely *al-Fath al-quṣṣī* by Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201), we again find several references to the *latt*.<sup>72</sup> However, these references are often dictated by the rhyming style of the author's prose and all occur as synonyms for the *dabbūs* – especially one entirely made of iron, the *dabbūs ḥadīd*. When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's personal arms and armour were sent to the 'Abbāsīd caliph in Baghdad after his death, his mace was referred to as a *dabbūs ḥadīd*.<sup>73</sup>

By the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century references to the *latt* became extremely scarce in the written sources. But when the term does occur, it is almost always attached to the word *ḥadīd* (*latt ḥadīd*), which is to be understood as *dabbūs ḥadīd*. In this context, the author of *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh*, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī (d. after 622/1225) used the term *maqma'a* to designate an extraordinarily heavy iron *dabbūs* weighing 41 kg.<sup>74</sup> This is the first and only time that the term *maqma'a*, which is the pure Arabic equivalent of the term *dabbūs* (see below), occurs in history sources. Although its use might, to a large extent, be due to the sophisticated Arabic style of the author, it certainly indicates that the term *latt* which originally meant a heavy mace, had by now completely fallen out of use and that the term *dabbūs* had become the sole generic term for a mace.

It was probably in the second half of the sixth/twelfth or the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century that, within the context of Mamlūk military training, the rules of the art of fighting with a *dabbūs* were standardized in a recognized number of exercises called *bands*. Thirty five of these *bands* were later recorded by the Mamlūks of Egypt and Syria.<sup>75</sup> The *dabbūs* had indeed become the primary close-combat weapon for a Mamlūk *fāris* or fully trained cavalryman.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn Abū'l-Ḥasan, *al-Tārīkh al-bāhir fi'l-dawla al-Atābikiyya*, ed. A.A. Ṭulaymāt (Cairo-Baghdad, 1963), p. 93; *idem*, *al-Kāmil fi'l-tārīkh*, vol. XI, p. 544.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Al-Ṭarsūsī, *op. cit.*, fols. 121b-124a.

<sup>72</sup> Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad, *al-Fath al-quṣṣī fi'l-fath al-quṣṣī*, French translation by Henri Massé, *Conquête de la Syrie et de la Palestine par Saladin* (Paris, 1972), pp. 73, 238, 241 and 270.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Wāṣil, Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fi akhbār banī Ayyūb*, ed. J.A. al-Shayāl (Cairo, 1953-60), p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> See Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī, 'Alī Ibn Nāṣir, *Zubdat al-tawārīkh fi akhbār al-umārā' wa'l-mulūk al-Saljūqiyya*, ed. M. Nūr al-Dīn (Beirut, 1986), p. 127. The *dabbūs* in question was reportedly sent, together with a sword weighing 8 kg., by the Turkish Khāqān to the Saljūq Sultan Malikshāh Ibn Alparslān as a challenge and as a means of intimidation.

<sup>75</sup> On these *bands* and the Mamlūk treatises on the *dabbūs*, see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'Furūsiyya Literature of the Mamlūk Period', *op. cit.*, p. 124.



(figs. XII-2, XII-11-15, XII-44b, XII-46-47, XII-51b and XII-74-82)

Axes are a rather more straightforward subject. The Arabic word *fa's*, derived from the Akkadian *pāsu* (read *fāsu*),<sup>76</sup> is the generic term for the axe though it was rarely if ever used to designate a war-axe. The two terms commonly used for a war-axe were *ṭabarzīn* and *ṭabar*, both of which are of Persian origin.

It is generally believed that the *ṭabarzīn* represented a light, short-hafted, small-bladed cavalry war-axe somewhat similar to the seventeenth and eighteenth century Safawid *ṭabarzīns*. The supposed literal meaning of the term *ṭabarzīn* as 'saddle-axe' (see below) has largely influenced this interpretation. Conversely, the *ṭabar* is commonly considered as a large, long-hafted, heavy-bladed war-axe. These definitions will be reconsidered here.

There is considerable evidence to show that the terms *ṭabarzīn* and *ṭabar* did not denote specific types of war-axes but were generically used for a war-axe in two different periods. The term *ṭabarzīn*, which no doubt represents the genuine word for the war-axe, prevailed from the Sassanian period until the end of the fourth/tenth century. At the end of the fifth/eleventh or the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century the term *ṭabar*, which simply means axe, assumed the meaning of a war-axe and predominated from the second half of the sixth/twelfth century onwards.

Circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the Sassanian *ṭabarzīn* had a massive broad blade and a rather long haft. Indeed if, according to al-Ṭabarī, the Sassanian horseman had to choose between the *ṭabarzīn* and the *'amūd*, the logical reason for such a choice was that carrying both would not only be cumbersome but also unnecessary as either could do the same job. This implies that the Sassanian *ṭabarzīn* must have had a large and heavy blade in order to be as effective as the ponderous *'amūd*. The dreadful effectiveness of the Sassanian *ṭabarzīn* can further be inferred from Sassanian legends such as that of Bahrām gūr and the two lions.<sup>77</sup> Here, in order to regain the kingdom of his father, Bahrām gūr (420-438/39) chose the *ṭabarzīn* as his only weapon when he decided to face and kill, single-handedly and on foot, the two starving lions which guarded the royal crown. This clearly indicates that, in addition to being a powerful and reliable weapon, the Sassanian *ṭabarzīn* could also be used on foot and surely was not short-hafted. The importance of the *ṭabarzīn* as a close combat weapon is also emphasized in several passages in the *Shāhnāmāh*.<sup>78</sup>

The first mention of the *ṭabarzīn* in Arabic sources occurred in a poem by the famous Umayyād bedouin poet Jarīr (d. 110/728). The context was not war, nor was the *ṭabarzīn* referred to as a combat weapon but rather as an instrument of corporal punishment. The poet was reminding a person named Mujīb, who was accused of theft but had been released for lack of evidence, that his right hand narrowly escaped getting chopped off by a *ṭabarzīn* which, being so powerful, could have dismembered a whole body (*ṭabarzīn qayn miqdaban lilmafāṣil*).<sup>79</sup> This very significant evidence almost speaks for itself. It certainly shows that, since its first occurrence in Arabic sources in the first/seventh century, the term *ṭabarzīn* had a wide non-exclusive meaning, and that this *ṭabarzīn* almost certainly had a broad heavy blade with a double-handed shaft. These characteristics were the same as those of the Sassanian *ṭabarzīn* which, during this early period, must still have been available in Iraq where Jarīr spent the greater part of his life as a poet.

<sup>76</sup> On the terminology of Mesopotamian weaponry, see A. Salonen, *Die Waffen Der Alten Mesopotamier*, *Societas Orientalis Fennica* (Helsinki, 1966).

<sup>77</sup> Al-Jāhiz, Abū 'Uthmān Ibn 'Amrū Ibn Baḥr (attributed to), *Kitāb al-tāj* (Beirut, 1955), pp. 275-6.

<sup>78</sup> See A.S. Melikian-Chirvānī, 'The Ṭabarzīn of Loṭf 'Alī, in *Islamic Arms and Armour*, ed. R. Elgood (London, 1979), pp. 116-35.

<sup>79</sup> See Jarīr, Ibn 'Aṭīyya Ibn al-Khaṭfī, *Diwān Jarīr* (Cairo, 1354/1935), p. 435.



Notwithstanding this early reference to the *ṭabarzīn*, we have no evidence that conventional Arab cavalry ever used it in the first/seventh century or even later. The very few references to its use under the Umayyād Caliphate are found in third/ninth-century 'Abbāsid sources. They refer only to its use in *Khurāsān* and none of them concern the Arab caliphal army.

The *ṭabarzīn* was, however, definitely used by the *Khurāsānīs* (fig. XII-2), and evidence for such a use dates from the birth of the 'Abbāsid State.<sup>80</sup> It seems that it was only fully introduced to 'Abbāsid cavalry in general after the advent of Caliph al-Ma'mūn with his new, mostly Persian though largely Arabicized, *Khurāsānian* troops who took pride in their use of this weapon, as reported by al-Jāhīz.<sup>81</sup> The *ṭabarzīn* also became a common and favourite weapon of *ghilmān* troops from the very inception of their institution early in the third/ninth century up to the beginning of the second half of the fourth/tenth century.<sup>82</sup> Subsequent developments prove that this period of about 150 years represented the apogee of the war-axe as a major close-combat cavalry weapon in Islamic medieval history (figs. XII-14 and XII-76-79) (Editor's note: This was also around the time when the heavy war-axe became a famous and feared weapon in the hands of those Scandinavian Vikings who suddenly started raiding other parts of Western Europe. Trading and perhaps other forms of contact between Scandinavia and the Islamic world before and during these centuries have long been recognized as playing a part in the Vikings' sudden and otherwise largely unexplained emergence as major players in European history.)

The second half of the fourth/tenth century witnessed a rapid decline in the importance of the *ṭabarzīn*. In the fifth/eleventh century references to its use became extremely scarce. Even the Fāṭimids, who enthusiastically copied eastern 'Abbāsid styles of weaponry and military equipment, apparently never adopted the *ṭabarzīn* as part of their arsenal – even on a ceremonial level. This clearly indicates that, at the time of the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt in 358/969, the military forces of the previous regime, which were mainly composed of ill-equipped *ghilmān* troops, were not using the *ṭabarzīn* to any significant extent. It also shows that use of the *ṭabarzīn* in other Arab areas was either non-existent or extremely marginal.

By the sixth/twelfth century the term *ṭabarzīn* had already become obsolete in the Arab areas and it completely disappeared from contemporary sources with the exception of two dictionaries where, paradoxically, it was included for the first time. The first one was the Arabic-Persian technical dictionary of al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124-5) entitled *al-Sāmī fi'l-asāmī*. Here the author simply gave the term *ṭabarzīn* as the Persian equivalent of the Arabic term *mi'wal*, which means pickaxe! This evidently indicated that the meaning of *ṭabarzīn* as a war-axe was not only lost in Arabic but was also lost in Persian. Furthermore al-Maydānī, whose dictionary represents an important source of military terms and weaponry in both Arabic and Persian, did not give any alternative word for war-axe in either language.

Probably the meaning of *ṭabarzīn* as a war-axe would have been lost entirely if the Baghdādī linguist and philologist, Abū Manṣūr al-Jawālīqī (d. 540/1145) had not written his famous 'Dictionary of Arabicized foreign terms' (*al-Mu'arrab min al-kalām al-a'jamī*) where, for the first time in an Arabic dictionary (and indeed in any language), the term *ṭabarzīn* was not only mentioned but was defined. Al-Jawālīqī's definition of *ṭabarzīn* ran as follows: '*ṭabarzīn*: a Persian term meaning *fa's al-sarj* "saddle-axe" because Persian horsemen carry it to fight with it'.<sup>83</sup> This

<sup>80</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. VIII, p. 48.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Jāhīz, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amrū Ibn Baḥr, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 200; al-Qurtubī, 'Arīb Ibn Sa'id, *Ṣilat tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XII, in Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*; Anonymous, *Kitāb al-'Uyūn wa'l-ḥadā'iq fī akhbār al-ḥaqā'iq*, ed. O. Saīdī (Damascus, 1972), vol. I, pp. 2-3, and vol. II, pp. 370 and 432; Al-Rashīd Ibn al-Zubayr, *loc. cit.*; al-Ṣābī, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 80 and 91.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Jawālīqī, Abū Manṣūr Mawḥūb Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad, *al-Mu'arrab min al-kalām al-a'jamī 'alā ḥurūf al-mu'jam*, ed. A.M. Shākir (Cairo, 1942), p. 228.



truncated definition of *ṭabarzīn*, which will be examined later, was uncritically accepted by subsequent eastern and western dictionaries.

This was, in any case, virtually the last occurrence of the word *ṭabarzīn* in 'Abbāsid sources. Al-Ṭarsūsī used the term *nāḥakh* to designate a war-axe, and to the best of my knowledge he is the only Arab author who did use it. This he described as having a half-moon head, 25 cms long and about 15 cm across (figs. XII-76 and XII-80).<sup>84</sup> Yet this term never took root in the Arab region and from the second half of the sixth/twelfth century onwards the war-axe was simply called a *ṭabar* (axe).

During the Mamlūk period, the term *ṭabar* was generically used for all types of war-axes be they short or long hafted, with large or small, light or heavy blades, asymmetrical (bearded) or crescent shapes, and whether they were carried on foot or on horseback (figs. XII-15 and XII-81). Generally speaking, however, the typical Mamlūk *ṭabar* had a rather large crescent or asymmetrical shaped blade about 23 to 31 cms long.<sup>85</sup> As for the haft, this varied in size according to whether it was to be used on foot or on horseback.

One Mamlūk *furūsiyya* treatise described the *ṭabar* suitable for a horseman as having a fairly large bearded (*mudhannab*) blade and a haft which was not very long.<sup>86</sup> A miniature from another *furūsiyya* treatise also shows a Mamlūk horseman brandishing a *ṭabar* with a crescent-shape blade<sup>87</sup> (fig. XII-44b).

Nevertheless, fighting on horseback with the *ṭabar* was not part of regular Mamlūk training and formations in the *ṭibāq* (military school).<sup>88</sup> In fact, the rank and file Mamlūks, the *ḥalqa* troopers, and even the low ranking *amīrs* were not entitled to carry such war-axes which were generally reserved for Sultans and high ranking *amīrs*.<sup>89</sup> As for the *ṭabardāriyya* (the *ṭabar*-bearers) who almost certainly originated from 'Abbāsid *ṭabarzīn*-bearers (see below), they were a small unit of Mamlūk élite troops selected from the royal Mamlūks (*al-mamālīk al-sultāniyya*) as bodyguards and escorts for the Sultan (fig. XII-15).<sup>90</sup> They were commanded by a low ranking *amīr* called the *amīr ṭabar*.<sup>91</sup> The *ṭabars* which they carried were not designed merely for show and parade purposes, but were real war-axes exactly the same as those used on horseback. The *ṭabardāriyya* obviously carried their *ṭabars* attached to their saddles when they accompanied the Sultan on his travels and military expeditions.

So, if the Mamlūk *ṭabar* was carried attached to the saddle and was used as a cavalry close-combat weapon, why was it not called a *ṭabarzīn*? When Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmārī (d. 749/1349) described, in the refined literary style of his *al-Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf*, the main weapons used by the Mamlūk army, he called their war-axe a *ṭabarzīn*. In his section on the war-axe, instead of using as a heading the term *ṭabar* which was the current term for a war-axe during the Mamlūk period, al-ʿUmārī used the term *ṭabarzīn*. But as the latter had long been obsolete, al-ʿUmārī had to explain it by twice repeating that 'the *ṭabarzīn* is the *ṭabar*' (*al-ṭabarzīn huwa'l-*

<sup>84</sup> Al-Ṭarsūsī, *op. cit.*, fols. 124a-125a.

<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., H. Nickel, 'A Mamlūk Axe', in *Islamic Arms and Armour*, ed. R. Elgood (London, 1979), pp. 149-61.

<sup>86</sup> Anonymous, *Kāmil al-ṣināʿa fī-l-furūsiyya wa-l-shajāʿa*, Cairo, Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, inv. no. 34 *funūn ḥarbiyya*, fols. 131b-132a.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, *Kitāb al-makḥzūn jāmiʿ al-funūn*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. 2824, fol. 60a.

<sup>88</sup> For a detailed account on the formation and training of the Mamlūk *fāris* in the *ṭibāq*, see Shihab al-Sarraf, 'L'Archerie mamlūke' (648-923/1250-1517) (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université de la Sorbonne, 1989), vol. III, pp. 707-86.

<sup>89</sup> Shihab al-Sarraf, *L'Archerie mamlūke* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 771.

<sup>90</sup> For more information on *al-ṭabardāriyya*, see al-ʿUmārī, Faḍl Allāh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālīk al-amṣār* (Egypt, Syria, Hijāz and Yemen), ed. A.M. Sayyid (Cairo, 1985), p. 30; al-Zāhirī, Khalīl Ibn Shāhīn, *Zubdat kashf al-mamālīk wa bayān al-turuq wa'l-masālik*, ed. P. Ravaisse (Paris, 1894), pp. 115-16; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp. 22-3 and 46, and vol. V, pp. 458-62; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ = al-Mawāʿiz wa-l-iʿtibār* . . . (Cairo, 1853), vol. II, p. 209; H. al-Bāshā, *al-Funūn wa'l-waḥaʾif ʿalā'l-āthār al-islāmiyya* (Cairo, 1965-6), vol. I, p. 330, vol. II, p. 735.

<sup>91</sup> This post was usually occupied by an *amīr* of ten (i.e. one entitled to own ten Mamlūks) or even someone who did not have the status of *amīr* at all. However, in all cases he had to be chosen from the *khāṣakiyya*.



*ṭabar*). Then he went on to describe the virtues of the *ṭabarzīn*, while in reality he was writing about the Mamlūk *ṭabar*.<sup>92</sup>

In fact, one of the main reasons for the confusion found in modern research concerning Islamic war-axes is the currently accepted definition of the word *ṭabarzīn* as a 'saddle-axe'. This definition, which we owe to al-Jawālīqī, contributed to the impression that the *ṭabarzīn* was a light saddle-axe which was thus distinct from the *ṭabar*. Furthermore this definition is based entirely on the assumption that the suffix *zīn* in the word *ṭabarzīn* was meant to denote a saddle. But, as the editor and commentator of the new edition of al-Jawālīqī's work so rightly observed, the '*zīn*' in *ṭabarzīn*, which was a Pahlawī word spoken in the pre- and proto-Islamic periods, did not occur in the well-known sense of saddle. Instead it had the meaning of 'weapon' which was the real meaning of *zīn* or *zēn* in Pahlawī.<sup>93</sup> The suffix *zīn* was attached to the word *ṭabar* (axe) to distinguish it as a weapon rather than being an ordinary or non-military *ṭabar*. Similarly the term *zīn-afraz* meant 'horse-armour'. Thus, the correct and even literal meaning of the term *ṭabarzīn* is simply war-axe or battle-axe, and not saddle-axe. Al-Jawālīqī more than once ventured unlikely opinions and judgements. When he opted for *zīn* meaning saddle instead of *zīn* meaning weapon, this was not only because of his ignorance of the Pahlawī origin of the term *ṭabarzīn*. It was also because this option seemed the most logical at the time, since the saddle was the obvious place where a war-axe was attached when being carried by a horseman.

Once the *ṭabarzīn* is understood and translated as a war-axe instead of a saddle-axe, the literary evidence regarding the *ṭabarzīn* from the Sassanian period down to the end of the fourth/tenth century certainly becomes more understandable and coherent. With *ṭabarzīn* literally meaning a war-axe, there is no longer any need to wonder why the term *ṭabarzīn* was generically used for all types and uses of a war-axe during its apogee under the 'Abbāsids, in exactly the same way that the term *ṭabar* was used during the Mamlūk period. Nor is it any longer puzzling to read that, for example, the *ṭabarzīn* was used during 'Abbāsid palace ceremonial and that there were *ṭabarzīn*-bearers attending and guarding the Caliph (see below) much as later Mamlūk *ṭabar*-bearers attended the Sultan.

The rendering of *ṭabarzīn* as war-axe rather than as saddle-axe also means that the decline of the *ṭabarzīn* in the second half of the fourth/tenth century was not the decline of the light saddle-axe but of war-axes in general. This further implies that we can no longer consider the later *ṭabar* as being a new type of a war-axe in contrast to the earlier *ṭabarzīn*. Rather it should be seen as the re-emergence of the 'Abbāsid *ṭabarzīn*, though on a more limited scale as a strictly elite weapon under the simple denomination of *ṭabar*.

Here, we may ask why the war-axe did not assume its original name of *ṭabarzīn* when it re-emerged? The answer is clear. The decline and abandonment of the war-axe as a close-combat weapon from the end of the fourth/tenth century onwards was naturally accompanied by a decline and abandonment of the term which denoted it; namely *ṭabarzīn*. As the term had been forgotten by the time that the war-axe reappeared, the weapon was logically known by its most obvious name, *ṭabar*, which was always the usual word for an axe in Iraq during the 'Abbāsid period until today.

References to the use of *ṭabarzīn* during the third/ninth and the first half of the fourth/tenth centuries show that it was a deadly and effective weapon against an armoured foe. This indicates that the 'Abbāsid *ṭabarzīn* had a heavy and rather large blade. On the other hand the real importance of the *ṭabarzīn* during this period probably came from its role in filling the gap between a light *dabbūs* and a very heavy, often unavailable, *amūd*. The situation then changed radically in the second half of the fourth/tenth century with the emergence of the *latt*,

<sup>92</sup> See al-Umarī, Faḍl Allāh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad, *al-Ta'rif bi'l-muṣṭalah al-sharīf* (Beirut, 1988), p. 265.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. al-Jawālīqī, *al-Mu'arrab*, a new critical edition and commentary by F. 'Abd'l-Rahīm (Beirut, 1990), p. 449.



effectively a heavy *dabbūs*, which quickly imposed itself as the principle cavalry weapon. As such it took over the role of both the *'amūd* and the *ṭabarzīn*. Thereafter the *ṭabarzīn* did not survive for long and it had almost completely disappeared as a regular cavalry weapon by the end of that century.

However, the emergence of the heavy *dabbūs* cannot alone explain the total marginalization and then disappearance of the *ṭabarzīn*, especially if it was really such an effective weapon. Other factors, economic, political and functional, must also have contributed to its decline. Although generally less costly than the *'amūd*, the *ṭabarzīn* was nevertheless an expensive élite weapon. In order to be effective against armour it needed a heavy blade of high quality steel since iron and especially bronze did not take an edge well. It also required an overall solid construction and regular maintenance. Furthermore, the haft was often made of iron to endure the stress when the blade struck armour. The wide use of the *ṭabarzīn* among *ghilmān* troops during the early 'Abbāsid period reflected the prosperity and power that the Caliphal empire enjoyed. The loss of this prosperity and the disintegration of 'Abbāsid power, coinciding with the emergence of much less costly yet effective and practical weapons such as the *latt*, brought the downfall of the *ṭabarzīn* in the same way as it did that of the *'amūd*.

As for the types of *ṭabarzīn* used during the early 'Abbāsid period, direct evidence is lacking. Nevertheless there are hints that the quarter-moon, half-moon, double-bladed and perhaps also the bearded types were all known (figs. XII-46-47). It is also difficult at this stage of research to pinpoint a dominant type given the wide range of possible sources of supply within the context of the flourishing third/ninth century international arms trade. One such supply centre was, for example, Armenia from which came, according to al-Mas'ūdī, *ṭabarzīns* called *sīwārdiyyā*. This name is the plural of *al-sīwārdī* which is derived from Servodik, the name of an Armenian tribe.<sup>94</sup> But most probably an important number of war-axes, especially those destined to élite troops, were made locally in caliphal arsenal workshops.

The 'Abbāsids were the first Islamic dynasty to be attended by *ṭabarzīn*-bearers as part of their palace ceremonial. During official audiences, the Caliph was surrounded by a number of both *ṭabarzīn*-bearers and mace-bearers carefully selected from among the *dāriyya* and *barrāniyya* (palace and non-palace) *ghilmān* and private servants.<sup>95</sup> The practice had been established since at least the third/ninth century and it continued during the first decades of Buwayhid domination when the Caliphs lost their temporal power. When in 367/977, according to Hilāl al-Ṣābī, the Caliph al-Ṭā'ī received the Buwayhid 'Aḍud al-Dawla, his throne was surrounded by a hundred of his private servants (*al-khadam al-khāṣṣa*) in beautiful attire, with coloured garments, wearing belts and swords hanging from baldrics (*suyūf al-ḥamā'il*) studded with jewellery. They also carried in their hand maces (*dabābīs*) and war-axes, *ṭabarzīnāt* (pl. of *ṭabarzīn*).<sup>96</sup> *Ṭabarzīn*-bearers were also present during the reception of foreign embassies. For example, during the visit of a Byzantine embassy to the 'Abbāsid court in 305/917 the Byzantine envoys, while waiting to be received by the Caliph al-Muqtadir, were attended by *ghilmān* and servants carrying *ṭabarzīns*.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, when the envoys were granted audience and made their half day journey on foot within the palatial compound they passed thirteen palaces before reaching their destination, passing by thousands of *ḥujariyya ghilmān* and servants standing in rows on foot, carrying *'amūds* and *ṭabarzīns*.<sup>98</sup>

As these *ṭabarzīns* were real weapons like those of the later Mamlūk *ṭabardāriyya*, their decoration was largely limited to the hafts which were often adorned with golden sleeves. This does not, however, mean that purely parade *ṭabarzīn* axes did not exist at that time. An idea of

<sup>94</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 243 and vol. VI, p. 403.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Ṣābī, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 80 and 91.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>98</sup> Al-Rashīd Ibn al-Zubayr, *op. cit.*, p. 136.



what a purely parade *ṭabarzīn* might have looked like can be drawn from the description of a *ṭabarzīn* sent, among many other things, by the Byzantine emperor Romanos (AD 920–44) to the Caliph al-Rādī billāh in 326/937. It had a heavy head of gilded silver encrusted with jewels and pearls, with a gilded haft decorated in a similar manner.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, the inevitable question that needs to be asked is why the war-axe re-emerged in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century? First of all, it should be stressed that the war-axe reappeared on a very limited level as a ceremonial and princely weapon. It never regained the role that it formerly enjoyed as a major close-combat weapon during the first 'Abbāsid period.

The re-emergence of the war-axe in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century coincided remarkably closely with the resurgence of 'Abbāsid power in Iraq. This resurgence was accompanied by a revival and reaffirmation of caliphal institutions after 150 years of desolation and deprivation under Buwayhid and Saljūqid rule. Monetary independence with the issuing and striking of gold coinage in Baghdad in the name of the caliph, the building and strengthening of the caliphal army, the restoration and confirmation of court rules and ceremonial plus the reintroduction of the royal hunt, marked the beginning of this new era. A golden period, in both the figurative and literal senses, was inaugurated by the caliphate of al-Muqtafī (530–55/1136–60) who was described by Ibn al-Athīr as 'the first 'Abbāsid caliph to have gained independence in Iraq since the advent of the Buwayhids'.<sup>100</sup> The period of revival was only terminated by the Mongol invasion in the seventh/thirteenth century.

The overall evidence strongly suggests that the *ṭabarzīn* was now reintroduced by the 'Abbāsid Caliphs as part of their efforts to reinstate court rules and traditions. Upholding religious and temporal symbols of sovereignty and ensigns of royalty to ensure the survival of their institution in a world which they could no longer control by military might was, indeed, the policy of the last seven 'Abbāsid Caliphs of Baghdad. The fact that the war-axe in its above-described role was nowhere so conspicuous as in the Mamlūk Sultanate, which was the most notable inheritor and perpetuator of 'Abbāsid institutions and traditions, itself constitutes a convincing argument for the 'Abbāsid origin of the later war-axe – the *ṭabarzīn*.

### The Sword

Although rivalled by the mace and the war-axe, which were generally considered more effective against an armoured foe, great importance was nevertheless attached to the sword as both a cavalry and an infantry weapon in third/ninth century *furūsiyya* literature. In fact its role in close combat was enhanced. Beside the traditional prestige of the sword, there were five principal factors for this enhanced prestige. The first was the definitive adoption of new styles of swords which were used for both thrusting and cutting. Secondly, there was a refinement in a cavalryman's combat techniques and training in the use of the sword. Thirdly, there were changes in overall cavalry tactics, mainly inspired by Turco-Iranian military traditions. Fourthly, there was wider access to swords of high quality. Fifthly, there was a far greater availability of swords when compared to other close combat weapons, some of which were reserved for the élite.

In his treatise, Ibn Akhī Hizām only occasionally referred to other close combat weapons, yet he devoted a lengthy chapter to the sword which he upheld as the noblest and most trustworthy of all weapons. Ibn Akhī Hizām mentioned three styles of sword, reflecting the cultural and ethnic diversity of the 'Abbāsid army in the third/ninth century. These were a straight double-edged sword (*sayf dhū'l-haddayn*), a single edged sword called *al-sughdī* ('the Sughdian') and the

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>100</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-tārīkh*, *op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 256.



'edge-and-a-half' sword (*ḥadd wa nisf*) which was also called *al-khisrawānī* (in Persian 'the royal Persian'). The author provided no further information on the characteristics of these swords but significantly he did add that:

To me, the sword most suitable for combat is the one originally endowed with a sharp pointed end suitable for thrusting and stabbing. For the sword can indeed be far more effective in thrusting and stabbing than in cutting.

(*wa anfa'uhā 'indī fi'l-liqā' mā kāna ḥādda'l-dhabbatī daqīquhā 'ala ṭab'ihī yaṣlahu li'l-ṭa'ni wa'l-ba'ji. Wa rubbamā 'amila al-sayfu bi'l-ba'ji wa'l-ṭa'ni 'ad'āfa mā ya'malu bi'l-darbi*).<sup>101</sup>

On the whole this remark does not indicate that the straight double-edged sword was used mainly for cutting, but it was quite pertinent to the *khisrawānī* and *sughdī* swords. These no doubt represent sabres or proto-sabres with a straight or slightly curved blade which was convenient for both thrusting and cutting. Ibn Akhī Hizām's ensuing guidelines focus on how, when and where to thrust and to strike an armoured foe with the sword, on the techniques of sword combat from horseback and on the type of training and exercises a horseman needed in order to handle his sword perfectly. All seem relevant to sabres. This was best illustrated in the following initiation exercise where Ibn Akhī Hizām stated:

A green reed should be firmly fixed to the ground at the height of the rider. The horseman should approach it from the right-hand side at full gallop, just like when he is training to shoot from horseback. When he gets close to it he should, with one swift movement, draw his sword and strike the reed from right to left, cutting [off] the equivalent of one [hand] span. The same movement should be repeated until only one *dhirā'* [approximately 50 cm] is left of the reed.

The whole exercise should be repeated again and again until it is perfectly mastered. When that is done, five arrows should be planted in line at a distance of 10 *dhirā'* [approximately 5 m] from each other. The horseman, at full gallop, should in one run cut the arrows exactly at the same height, one after the other just beneath the fletching using a very sharp-edged sword.

When this is perfectly mastered, two parallel but staggered rows of five arrows each should be planted in the ground. The horseman, again at full gallop, should run between the two rows of arrows cutting them under the fletching as in the previous exercise, striking alternatively to the right and to the left. The number of arrows may be increased as required. When this is also perfectly mastered, the horseman should be trained to deal blows in all other directions.<sup>102</sup> (fig. XII-44f)

Furthermore, in order to maintain fitness in such sword play, Ibn Akhī Hizām urged the horseman to regularly practise polo, which he considered essential for the military training of a *fāris*.

The above exercise, whether devised by Ibn Akhī Hizām himself or by other 'Abbasīd *furusiyya* masters, remained the basic exercise for the sword-wielding cavalryman from the third/ninth century to the end of the Mamlūk Sultanate in 923/1517. It is obvious that this type of training favoured the sabre type weapon rather than the double-edged straight sword along with its military and cultural traditions (figs. XII-44a and XII-44e).

The 'edge-and-a-half' *khisrawānī* sabre immediately brings to mind later Mamlūk and Ottoman *qaljūrī* or *qilīc* sabres, except that the pointed double-edge part of the latter constituted approximately one-third of the blade rather than half of it. However I am strongly inclined to think that the expression 'edge-and-a-half' was figurative rather than a literal description. Consequently the *khisrawānī* could well be a true sabre of *qaljūrī* or *qilīc* type. Among the so-called 'holy swords' kept in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, there is a sabre of *qaljūrī* or *qilīc* type (inv. no. 21/139) (fig. XII-24). It is said to have belonged to Imām Zayn

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Akhī Hizām, *al-Kamāl fi'l-furusiyya* . . . (added title), Istanbul, Fāteḥ Mosque Library, inv. no. 3513, fols. 70a-b.

<sup>102</sup> *Uṣūl al-Fihrist*, 72b, 73a, b and 74a.



al-ʿAbdīn ʿAlī Ibn al-Husayn (d. 94/712). The double-edged part of the blade, which forms approximately one quarter of its total length of 97 cm, is noticeably curved. This specimen could well be the oldest surviving example of a *khisrawānī* sabre.

According to al-Kindī, *khisrawānī* swords were made in Fārs (southeast Iran) from *Sarandībī* (Ceylon, now Sri Lanka) steel. He divided the *khisrawānī* blades into two types: plain undecorated (*sawādhij*) and those decorated beneath the hilt 'with trees, human and other figures'. He ranked the watered blade of the *khisrawānī* sword as 'good quality *jawhar*' and classified it in a position midway between the ordinary *jawhar* blades and the 'noble *jawhar*' blades.<sup>103</sup> *Khisrawānī* swords were also made from steel brought from the Silmān mountains (in Afghanistan). However, we cannot be absolutely sure that the *khisrawānī* sabre mentioned by Ibn Akhī Hizām was the same as the *khisrawānī* sword mentioned by al-Kindī as the latter author gave no details regarding the form of its blade.

However it is obvious that, when Ibn Akhī Hizām used the name *al-Khisrawānī*, he meant a general style of blade and not a specific kind of sword as far as its type of steel or place of manufacture were concerned, as was the case in al-Kindī's writings. Thus, a *khisrawānī* sword could be made in Iraq or elsewhere, irrespective of the nature and provenance of its steel. This also applied to the use of the term *al-sughdī* and of double-edged swords in Ibn Akhī Hizām's writing.

The denomination *al-sughdī* confirms the Transoxanian origin of the single-edged sword. During the pre-Islamic period the Sassanians of Iran and Iraq were familiar with this type, though it was not a very common weapon in the region. Nor was the single-edged sword unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs, but it was surely not the type of sword that they preferred. In fact they nick-named it *al-aqlaf*, literally meaning the uncircumcised, which could indicate a certain dislike or even aversion to such a form of sword.<sup>104</sup> In the Topkapi Museum there is, in fact, a single-edged sword with a total length of 100 cms (inv. no. 21/130) which is said to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad (fig. XII-20). With its almost straight blade, this could very well be an early 'Abbāsid specimen of the *sughdī* sabre.

The Sughdian presence in 'Abbāsid Iraq was recorded as early as the reign of the Caliph al-Mahdī, or even earlier. The mother of the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim was herself of Sughdian origin though her father was reportedly raised as a child in southern Iraq. However, this presence had probably no significant bearing on weaponry and military tactics before a large-scale and steady recruitment of cavalymen from the sedentary population of Transoxania during the reigns of al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim. The earliest generations of these Transoxanian recruits obviously came with their own weapons. Certain facilities and aspects of infrastructure were probably also established by and/or for these Turks in Baghdad and Sāmarrā', not only to maintain and repair their weaponry but also to produce such equipment. It could be inferred from al-Jāhiz inferred that this included sabres.<sup>105</sup> However weapons, especially swords, were also among the main items imported from the Sughdian cities of Transoxania during the third/ninth century.<sup>106</sup>

As for the double-edged straight sword, this was too deeply rooted in the culture, history and economics of the region, as well as its military techniques and traditions, to be easily eclipsed by the rising importance of Sughdian and *khisrawānī* sabres. The double-edged straight sword was the Arab sword *par excellence* and had been hallowed as a symbol of Arab identity since the reign of the Caliph al-Manṣūr. A short time later it also became, *de facto*, an ensign of the Caliphate and an integral part of court ceremonial. Whether during a general audience, or in processions or on campaign, 'Abbāsid Caliphs always appeared wearing a double-edged sword

<sup>103</sup> Al-Kindī, *ibid.*, pp. 10 and 30.

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., Ibn Sida, *op. cit.*, vol. VI, p. 24.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 71-2.

<sup>106</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *al-Tabaṣṣur bi'l-tijāra* (Cairo, 1935), pp. 28-9; Cf. Also al-Dūrī, 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tārīkh al-'irāq al-iqtisādī fi'l-qarn al-rābi' al-hijrī* (*The Economic History of Iraq in the fourth/tenth century*) (2nd edn., Beirut, 1986), p. 139.



hanging from a baldric or shoulder-belt. 'Abbāsid dignitaries, including army commanders, usually did the same, irrespective of their ethnic origins. Furthermore, the straight double-edged sword became a central element in the investiture ceremony (*taqlīd*), of governorship (*wilāya*) as well as forming part of the *khil'a* (robe or gift) of honour or distinction (*tashrīf*).<sup>107</sup> This tradition was perpetuated in Mamlūk Egypt where the Caliphate took refuge after the Mongol invasion of Iraq in the mid-thirteenth century.

In Cairo the 'Abbāsid caliphs, whose nominal presence became part of Mamlūk court ceremonial, were mostly needed to bestow legitimacy on the Sultanate. For this reason the 'Abbāsid caliphs laid even greater emphasis on the wearing of an Arab sword on a baldric or shoulder-belt. This was worn along with black clothing and a Baghdadi style turban. In fact these items assumed higher symbolic value and became not only an expression of their identity but also an act of survival. Likewise, during their coronations, Mamluk sultans always appeared wearing, over the caliphal *khil'a*, an Arab sword suspended from a baldric.<sup>108</sup> However, far from being a relic of the past, these double-edged swords remained an omnipresent aspect of the military arsenal throughout the Mamlūk period. In addition to being worn by the Sultans, they were carried by Mamlūk dignitaries and members of the military establishment. This was, perhaps, not so much a matter of maintaining 'Abbāsid traditions, but because the double-edged straight sword was still considered a worthy rival to the *qaljūrī* sabre. In fact the rivalry between these two types of weapon persisted even at the level of rank-and-file Mamlūks and *ḥalqa* troopers (fig. XII-44a). This would explain the emphasis put on the merits of the *qaljūrī* by some Mamlūk *furūsiyya* authors such as Ibn Manglī, a *ḥalqa* commander, who proudly affirmed that 'the *qaljūrī* is our sword'.<sup>109</sup> He insisted on its superiority over the Arab sword which, he said, had a blunt or rounded tip and could only be used for cutting, whereas the *qaljūrī* could be used for thrusting and cutting, thus being suitable for both war and hunting. Nevertheless, the *qaljūrī* was undoubtedly more widely used by the Mamlūk army than was the straight double-edged sword which, for its part, was more typical of tribal Arab auxiliary troops; hence the purely Mamlūk expression, *al-sayf al-badawī* or *al-badāwī*, the 'bedouin sword' (fig. XII-34).

Many of these so-called 'bedouin swords' were, in fact, imported from Western Europe, as affirmed by al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Abdallāh al-'Abbāsī in his treatise *Athār al-'uwal fi tadbīr al-duwal* which was dedicated to the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars II (708-9/1309-10). After evoking the various types of swords mentioned by al-Kindī, al-'Abbāsī lamented that other than the predominant *qalajūriyāt* sabres, the swords common in his time were mainly the 'soft Frankish swords' (*al-suyūf al-ifranjiyya al-layyina*) in which the use of the term 'soft' referred to the metal from which they were made. These were namely *al-suyūf al-llamāniyya* or *al-almāniyya* meaning 'the German swords', *al-suyūf al-ankaburdiyya* (from *ankaburda* which was the Arabic name for Lombardy in Italy) and *al-suyūf al-burduliyya*,<sup>110</sup> which might have meant Bordelais swords

<sup>107</sup> See al-Ṣābī, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>108</sup> See, e.g., al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk li ma'rīfat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. M.M. Ziyādah and S.A. 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1934-1973), vol. II, pp. 46 and 48. It should be noted that in the coronation ceremony the 'Abbāsid Caliph also offered the Mamlūk Sultan a *qaljūrī* sabre with a baldric. The Sultan also appeared wearing both an Arab sword and a *qaljūrī* sabre. The custom of offering two swords had been known since the early 'Abbāsid period (see, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh . . .*, *op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 301). Probably by the end of the third/ninth century or the beginning of the fourth/tenth century one of the two swords offered to army commanders was a *khisrawānī* sabre. Clear evidence comes from the later 'Abbāsid period when it became part of the court rules to offer Turkish Sultans an Arab sword and a *qaljūrī* sabre. See, e.g., al-Nasawī, Muḥammad Ibn Ahmad, *Sīrat al-sulṭān jalāl al-dīn mangubartī* (the Khawārazm-Shah), ed. H.A. Ḥamdī (Cairo, 1953), pp. 307-8.

<sup>109</sup> Ibn Manglī, Muḥammad, *'Unsu'l-malā bi waḥshi'l-falā*, Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, inv. no. 12 Ṣinā'a, fols. 16a and 20a.

<sup>110</sup> Al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Abdallāh al-'Abbāsī, *Athār al-'uwal fi tadbīr al-duwal*, published in the margin of *Tārīkh al-khulafā'* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (Cairo, 1305/1886), p. 184. Two manuscripts of al-'Abbāsī's work have survived:



from France. While the sword trade with Western Europe may have continued via Venice during the eighth/fourteenth century, Syrian armourers never ceased to produce high quality double-edged sword blades of watered steel for the Mamlūk and Arab élites. This activity persisted until the advent of the Ottomans who eventually deported both these armourers and the bow makers of Syria *en masse* to Istanbul.

With the fall of the Mamlūk Sultanate, the story of the double-edged sword in the Arab and Islamic east virtually came to an end. Thereafter the type was comprehensively replaced in these regions by the Ṣafawid *shamshīr* and the Ottoman *qilīc*, the latter having hitherto been known as the *qaljūrī* sabre.

That the Mamlūk *qaljūrī* sabre represented a type corresponding to what now became known as the *qilīc* is indicated beyond any doubt by massive and consistent literary, pictorial and material evidence from the entire Mamlūk period (figs. XII-44a-f and XII-105). Nonetheless, neither the term *qaljūrī*, nor its variants, nor the type of sword itself, were Mamlūk developments. The terms *qaljūrī* or *qalājūrī* or *qarājūlī* (pl. *qaljūriyya*, *qaljūriyyāt*, *qalajūriyya*, *qalajūriyyāt* and *qarajūliyyāt*) became common in Arabic sources from the fifth/eleventh century onwards, though there is evidence that the type had been widely known in the region since at least the fourth/tenth century (figs. XII-26, XII-30, XII-35-37 and XII-101-103). Some of the earliest references to its use come from Fāṭimid sources. Ibn al-Ṭuwayr makes it clear that under the Fāṭimid Caliphs of Egypt there were basically two types of sword: *al-suyūf al-'arabiyyāt* Arab swords which were also called *ṣamāsim*<sup>111</sup> (pl. of *samṣāma*), and *al-suyūf al-qaljūriyyāt* or *qaljūrī* swords. The latter were described as *al-suyūf al-muḥaddaba* or curved swords<sup>112</sup> and were generally associated with Turks and *ghilmān* troops.

The earliest reference to curved swords in 'Abbāsid sources is found in al-Jāḥiẓ's epistle *Manāqib al-Turk* where Khurāsānī troops are said to boast of their 'crooked scabbards' (*al-aghmad al-mu'aqqafa*) which surely indicate curved sabres.<sup>113</sup> Considering the prevailing styles of sword in the third/ninth century, and the guidelines and preferences indicated by Ibn Akhi Hizām as both a *furūsiyya* master and as commander of the Khurāsānī corps, it is reasonable to suggest that the type of sabre indicated by the expression 'crooked scabbards' was the *khisrawānī* sabre. Notwithstanding a striking similarity between the *khisrawānī* and the *qaljūrī* sabres (see above), current research does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions on this matter, though we can no longer overlook the possibility that the *khisrawānī* might be the forerunner of the *qaljūrī* sabre. On the other hand there is no solid evidence for the seemingly obvious Turkish origin of the *qaljūrī* sabre. In fact the question cannot be answered on the flimsy basis that the Turkish and *ghilmān* troops in this region naturally preferred the sabre to the double-edged sword. A supposed link between the terms *qaljūrī* and *qilīc* too easily induced some scholars to read the texts as *qilījūrī* instead of *qaljūrī*, ignoring other more significant variants of this term, while also suggesting that *qaljūrī* was derived from the word *qilīc*. A careful examination of the overall body of evidence shows that the term *qaljūrī* was simply a vocal inflection of *qalājūrī* or *qarājūlī*, derived from the Persian word *qarāchūrī* or *qarāchūr*

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, inv. no. 5980, and Military Museum Library, Cairo, inv. no. 383. On some surviving examples of these European so-called 'bedouin' swords, see E. Combe, and A.F.C. De Cosson, 'European Swords with Arabic inscriptions from the armoury of Alexandria', *Bulletin de la Société royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie*, XXXI (1937), pp. 225-46; and E. Combe, 'Nouveaux sabres européens à inscriptions arabes de l'arsenal d'Alexandrie', *Bulletin de la Société royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* XXXII (1938), pp. 158-61.

<sup>111</sup> Originally the term *al-ṣamṣāma* was used to indicate a double-edged Arab sword which does not bend (*lā yamṭhanī*) before it became a synonym for *sayf*. Al-Kindī, however, used the term for a large and noble, double-edged fluted *yamānī* (Yemeni) sword. The term *ṣamṣāma* gained fame in Arabic literature because it was the name that the famous warrior-poet 'Amr Ibn Ma'dikarib (d. 21/641) gave to his sword.

<sup>112</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *op. cit.*, p. 134. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Musawwadat kitāb al-mawā'iz*, ed. A.F. Sayyid (London, 1416/1995), p. 151.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā'il* . . . , *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 19-20.



which denoted a long-sword or a swordsman. The prefix *qarā*, supposing that it is in fact a prefix, means 'black' in Turkish and could suggest a Turkish origin for the term *qarāchūrī*. But Persian dictionaries do not pronounce on the matter.<sup>114</sup> In any case it is obvious that, on the linguistic level, there is no apparent link between the *qilīc*, *qarāchūrī* and the Arabic variants of the latter term.

Nor is the obvious similarity between the *qaljūrī* and the *qilīc* in terms of style of weapon itself an argument in favour of a Turkish origin for the *qaljūrī* sabre. The term *qilīc*, which did not appear in Arabic sources until long after the Ottoman conquest of the Arab region,<sup>115</sup> represents the general Turkish word for 'sword' and does not refer to a particular type, just as is the case with the Arabic *sayf* and the Persian *shamshīr*. The latter term was described by Arabic-Persian linguists and philologists like al-Maydānī (d. 531/1136) as the strict equivalent of the double-edged straight Arab *sayf* with all its varieties and synonyms.<sup>116</sup> It lost its generic meaning and acquired its current specific denomination as the Persian scimitar *par excellence* only in the sixteenth century under Ṣafawid rule (907–1144/1502–1735). This was when the type was fully developed and consecrated as the Iranian 'national' sabre. The term *qilīc* underwent a similar process during much the same period under Ottoman rule. In fact it is difficult to talk about the Ottoman *qilīc* before the sixteenth century, or even to assume that it was a predominant type. The Ottomans must have used all sorts of swords during their early period of expansion, including European swords. The reason was not only a lack of raw material but also of skilled labour such as swordsmiths. In an Ottoman 'craftsmen fee register' (*defter-i mavâcib-i Ehl-i Hiref*) dated 883/1478 there were only three swords makers (*simsirgeren*) working for the *Sarāy* Palace or government.<sup>117</sup> Quite a few examples of ostensibly Ottoman sabres and swords survive from the fifteenth century, but none of them date before the reign of Muhammad II (855–886/1451–1481). Most of these sabres and swords were, in fact, made in the Mamlūk *zardakhāna* or arsenal as royal gifts from the Mamlūk Sultans to the Ottoman sultans. The magnificent Ottoman sabre-making industry was virtually created in the first half of the sixteenth century, employing Syrian and Egyptian armourers who, either by force or choice, were established in great numbers in Istanbul after the fall of the Mamlūk Sultanate. They carried on where they had left off, and the *qaljūrī* was reborn as the *qilīc* in an Ottoman context. Furthermore it was only during the second half of the tenth/sixteenth century that the Ottoman *qilīc*, under the influence of the Persian *shamshīr*, started assuming a distinctive style; but this is another subject.

### *Length and Width of Swords*

Ibn Akhī Hizām urged the horseman to use a short sword because it was easier to handle on horseback than was the long sword which, he said, was more suitable for the foot soldier.<sup>118</sup> According to al-Kindī, short swords, if well made, also had a better capacity for cutting than did long swords.<sup>119</sup>

The blade of the shortest sword recorded by al-Kindī measured, without its tang, three spans and four closed fingers (approximately 76 cm). Two 'Abbāsīd double-edged blades, each

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g., F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. (London, 1930), p. 961.

<sup>115</sup> It occurred, though as a name and title, especially for the Saljūqīd princes (for example several named Qilīc Arsalan).

<sup>116</sup> Al-Maydānī, *op. cit.* (Cairo, 1967), pp. 235–7.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Yücel Unsal, *al-Suyūf al-islāmīyya wa ṣunnā'uhā* (originally written in Turkish), Arabic translation by T.A. Oglu (Kuwait, 1988), p. 138.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Akhī Hizām, *op. cit.*, fol. 69a.

<sup>119</sup> Al-Kindī, *op. cit.*, p. 13.



measuring exactly 76 cm plus 10 cm for the tang, survive in the Topkapi Museum (inv. nos. 1/99 1/101) (figs. XII-86 and XII-98). The longest sword mentioned by al-Kindī measured, again without its tang, five spans (approximately 112 cm). This would give a total length of about 125 cm, taking into account that the tang of such a long sword would be more than the 10 cm, which is the average length suitable for shorter swords. However, very few long swords survive from this period, and none correspond to the 'five spans sword'. Nevertheless there is in the Topkapi Museum an exceptionally long sword (inv. no. 21/143) (fig. XII-23) which, with its hilt, measures 140 cm. It is said to have belonged to the Prophet's companion Ja'far al-Tayyār (d. 8/629).

The most common length recorded by al-Kindī corresponds to what can be considered a medium-short sword. It is four spans without its tang (approximately 90 cm). This length seems, indeed, to have been the average length during the 'Abbāsīd period, especially for a horseman, as the majority of 'Abbāsīd blades kept in the Topkapi Museum measure between 88 cm and 91 cm without their tangs, or around 100 cm with the tang. A less common length exceeded four spans but was less than five spans. The sword of Caliph al-Musta'īn (248-252/862-866), which is again kept in the Topkapi Museum (inv. no. 1/109), measures 96 cm for the blade (approximately four spans and four fingers) and is 105 cm with its tang (fig. XII-85).

The average total length of the double-edged sword of the Mamlūk period was around 100 cm, while the length of the Mamlūk *qaljūrī* blade without its tang varied between roughly 80 and 90 cm. However, there is one exceptionally long *qaljūrī* in the Topkapi Museum (inv. no. 1/385) which has a total length of 144 cm, the blade alone being 123 cm long (fig. XII-105).

As for the width of the blade, this could reach four fingers or even more, especially if it was a Yemeni *ṣafīḥa*. The average width was, however, around three fingers. Two Yemeni *ṣafīḥas* survive in the Topkapi Museum. The first (inv. no. 2/3775) is said to have belonged to the Caliph 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān and has a total length of 115 cm (fig. XII-22). The second (inv. no. 21/138) is said to have belonged to the Caliph 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalīb and has a total length of 112 cm (fig. XII-21). While the attribution of these two swords remains questionable, they no doubt represent the earliest known *ṣafīḥa* swords. In fact the former is a unique surviving specimen of a noble Yemeni *ṣafīḥa* as was described in detail by al-Kindī who called it a *šimsāma*.

### The Weight of Swords

Ibn Akhī Hizām warned the cavalryman never to use a sword which was too heavy for him to wield. Instead he should always use one that could be handled with perfect ease.<sup>120</sup> The lightest type of sword, according to al-Kindī, was the Yemeni *qubūriyya* type which weighed a maximum of 2 *ratls* (812.5 g) and a minimum of 1¾ *ratls* (711 g).<sup>121</sup> During the early Islamic period such *qubūriyya* swords were regularly found in the royal tombs of pre-Islamic Yemeni 'kings' known as *al-Tabābi'a*. Hence the term *qubūriyya* which came from the Arabic *qabr*, meaning 'tomb'.<sup>122</sup> It is clear from al-Kindī that these swords were still available in the internationally important sword market of Baghdad during his own time, but we do not know if al-Kindī was referring to

<sup>120</sup> Ibn Akhī Hizām, *op. cit.*, fol. 70a.

<sup>121</sup> Al-Kindī, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 19 and 21.

<sup>122</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, *al-Jamāhir fi'l-jawāhir*, ed. Yūsuf al-Hādī (Iran, 1995), pp. 372 and 409. Cf. also al-Kindī, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 and 21. The meaning of the term *qubūriyya* in al-Kindī's treatise on swords escaped the vigilance of its editor, the late 'Abd al-Raḥmān Zakī, who thought that it was a copyist's error. Consequently he took the liberty of replacing it with the term *qaljūriyya* and compounded his error by defining the latter as an Andalusian double-edged sword, quoting an uninformed opinion (in Z.M. Ḥasan, *Kunūz al-fāṭimiyyīn* [Cairo, 1937], p. 56). See al-Kindī, *op. cit.*, p. 17 n. 8; and A.R. Zakī, *al-Sayf fi'l-'ālam al-islāmī* (Cairo, 1957), p. 117.



the original swords or to new ones made in the same style. The maximum weight mentioned by al-Kindī was 5 *ratls* (approximately 2.03 kg) which was that of a noble Yemeni *safīḥa* as well as being that of a noble blade made of Indian steel called *al-fāqrūn*.<sup>123</sup> (Editor's note: Until modern times, a substantial number of varied swords continued to be found in graves dating from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods in the Jabal Akḥḍar region of central Oman.)<sup>124</sup>

The more common weights varied from 2¾ *ratls* (approximately 1117.18 g) to 4½ *ratls* (approximately 1828.1 g). Unfortunately, the weights of the early Islamic and 'Abbāsīd swords kept in the Topkapi and Military Museums in Istanbul have not been published, so it is not possible to compare them with the figures given by al-Kindī, or to draw a clearer picture of the average weight of 'Abbāsīd swords.

### *Manner of Wearing a Sword*

Swords, irrespective of their style, were worn hanging either from a baldric or shoulder straps called *ḥamā'il* (or *ma'ālīq*) in Arabic (figs. XII-32, XII-33, XII-34, XII-79 and XII-106-108), or from a sword-belt girdle, known in Arabic as *manṭaqa* (pl. *manātiq*) or *ḥiyāsa* (pl. *ḥiyāsāt*) (figs. XII-3, XII-9b, XII-15, XII-18, XII-19, XII-25, XII-35-37, XII-43, XII-93, XII-94, XII-110 and XII-111). However, double-edged swords were more commonly worn in the former fashion while swords of *khisrawānī*, *qilīc* or *sughdī* types were usually suspended from the waist in keeping with Turco-Iranian traditions.

Although the second fashion became predominant among 'Abbāsīd cavalry by the third/ninth century, Ibn Akḥī Ḥizām found that it compromised a horseman in battle and so he completely rejected it.<sup>125</sup> He argued that, whereas both hands were needed to unsheath a sword hung from a waist-belt, the horseman needed only one hand to swiftly draw a sword that was slung from a shoulder strap. In this way, the cavalryman could easily alternate his weapons during combat and, most importantly, would neither lose control of his horse nor expose himself to the enemy. The shoulder strap or baldric should be worn short so that the grip of the sword was at the level of the rider's breast. When the horseman wanted to unsheath his sword he should thrust his left arm, which was holding the reins, between the upper part of the sword, just beneath the scabbard mouth, and the straps of the baldric. He should then exert an outward pressure so as to push and hold the lower part of the sword against his thigh. Then with his right hand he would draw the sword out over his left arm. He could put it back into its scabbard in the same way. To execute these two operations swiftly and properly, the horseman was urged always to ensure that the blade slid in and out of the scabbard with perfect ease. To facilitate this, Ibn Akḥī Ḥizām recommended making a vertical opening in the frontal side of the mouth of the scabbard.<sup>126</sup> This clearly indicated that the horseman was wearing a sabre rather than a sword, as such an opening was only relevant for a curved blade.

### *Sayf al-rikāb, Saddle Sword*

Ibn Akḥī Ḥizām would probably not have insisted on the above method of wearing and unsheathing a sword if all 'Abbāsīd cavalry had normally been equipped with the additional *sayf al-rikāb*. This was attached to the saddle beneath a rider's left thigh and was normally drawn using only one hand (figs. XII-112-113).

<sup>123</sup> Al-Kindī, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>124</sup> This information was provided to the editor by Capt. E. Roe who was one of the first to study these graves while attached to the Omani Army in the 1960s.

<sup>125</sup> Ibn Akḥī Ḥizām, *op. cit.*, fol. 70b.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 71b.



The earliest reference to a *sayf al-rikāb* dated from the first quarter of the fourth/tenth century. Here it was stated that, when the Caliph al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–932) marched against Mu'nis al-Khādim in 320/932, he was wearing the Prophet's sword called *Dhu'l-faqār* suspended from red leather shoulder straps or a baldric. He also carried beneath his left thigh a *sayf al-rikāb* attached to a Moroccan saddle.<sup>127</sup> The casual manner in which this information was related indicated that the *sayf al-rikāb* was familiar and was widely known at that time as being part of a horseman's equipment. Nevertheless its use was apparently more typical of *ghilmān* and other cavalry élites.

From early Mamlūk *furūsiyya* treatises, we know that the *sayf al-rikāb* was a standard and important item in the equipment of *al-ḥalqa* as well as Mamlūk cavalymen. Indeed in close combat, according to the *furūsiyya* masters, when the *dabbūs* had been lost or broken and recourse to a sword became inevitable, it was the *sayf al-rikāb* which should be used first, rather than the sword which was worn around the waist. The reason for this, according to the *ḥalqa* trooper and expert Baktūt al-Rammāḥ (end of the seventh/thirteenth century) was that the rider's personal sword represented his last and only refuge if unhorsed during battle. That was why, Baktūt insisted, the sword worn around the waist should never be used from horseback for fear of it being broken or lost, except as a last resort.<sup>128</sup>

### *Wearing More than One Sword*

It was almost commonplace in pre- and early-Islamic Arabia for tribal chieftains, famous horsemen or anyone who could afford it to wear two or even more swords in war. This habit had less to do with prestige and social distinction than for practical reasons. The sword was the early Arabs' sole close combat weapon and in the course of fighting there was a risk that it would not only get blunt but that it could be broken, especially if used against an armoured foe. For example, in the battle of Mu'ta (8/629) nine swords were reportedly broken in the hand of Khālid Ibn al-Walīd who was wearing several of them – though not, of course, all nine.<sup>129</sup>

The practice of wearing two swords, one on each side and slung from baldrics, survived well into the early 'Abbāsid period. It was adopted by people of different cultural and social backgrounds ranging from high state dignitaries like al-Faḍl Ibn Sahl (d. 202/818), who was the *vizīr* of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, to a professional Khurāsānī/Iraqī soldier named 'Abbās al-Nakhshabī (first half of the third/ninth century).<sup>130</sup>

Nevertheless by this period, when the sword had almost been relegated to a secondary position as a close combat weapon and when cavalry training systematically regulated and standardized the type and number of weapons to be used by cavalymen, the wearing of two swords with baldrics must have appeared somewhat anachronistic. In fact this practice, which had from the start been an élite habit, remained sporadic and highly individualistic. It certainly never became standard usage under the 'Abbāsids.

### *The Hilt*

Our knowledge of 'Abbāsid sword and sabre hilts mainly comes from literary and pictorial evidence. Material evidence is largely lacking as the existing 'Abbāsid swords preserved in the Islamic Reliquary, Topkapı and Military Museums in Istanbul are either without hilts or have

<sup>127</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *op. cit.*, vol. XII, p. 91.

<sup>128</sup> Baktūt al-Rammāḥ, *op. cit.*, fols. 46b–47a.

<sup>129</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-burṣān*, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *ibid.*, p. 575.



much more recent ones, most of which are of Ottoman origin.<sup>131</sup> All these later hilts are of the sloping type suitable for sabres while, with the exception of two items, all the existing 'Abbāsid swords are double-edged and must, therefore, originally have had straight hilts. It is on this latter type that the relevant Arab terminology is based. Hence, for example, the meaning of the principal Arabic term for sword grip, *qā'im*, literally means 'upright' or 'perpendicular'. Its synonym of *miqbad* is the generic word for a grip in the broadest sense of the term, being applied to other objects in addition to swords. The term *ri'ās* was very rarely used, but denoted the entire hilt including the pommel, grip and quillons.

Where the quillons are concerned, the term *shāribān* (literally, a pair of moustaches) was used, though further literary evidence is very sparse. However, the limited information provided by 'Abbāsid philologists and linguists confirms that straight quillons were typical of the Arab double-edged sword, and that during the third/ninth to fourth/tenth centuries these were still more widely used than were the down curved type which was more characteristic of single-edged swords. This lack of information, especially on the philological and linguistic level, reflects the marginal importance of quillons to the Arabs, particularly when compared to the attention they gave to the pommel.

'Abbāsid sources distinguish three basic types of pommel currently known to the Arabs. One was the disc shaped *qabī'a*, which was the most common during the pre- and proto-Islamic periods. Thus it became the generic term for a pommel. The other was the spherical pommel called a *qulla*, a variant type called *thūma* which meant 'garlic'. Finally there was the 'two-eared' pommel called *al-idhmān* (meaning ears) or *al-qirṭān* (meaning ear-rings).<sup>132</sup> A variant of the latter might be the *ṭabarzīn*-shaped pommel which was characteristic of the sword which 'Abbāsid Caliphs usually offered to army commanders during court ceremonies.<sup>133</sup> It probably indicated a two-eared or disc pommel shaped like a double-bladed half-moon *ṭabarzīn* war-axe (figs. XII-87, XII-90, XII-92, XII-95 and XII-117).

Another type of pommel, which was presumably introduced early in the third/ninth century, was in the form of a large hollow ring (figs. XII-29, XII-38 and XII-118-122) which, unlike other types, had an additional practical function. Some 'Abbāsid cavalrymen used to use this pommel ring to suspend their sword from the middle finger of their left hand, while retaining hold of the reins during combat. Ibn Akhī Hizām condemned this practice, arguing that dangling a sword in this way was precarious and, more importantly, was extremely inconvenient when the cavalryman reverted to the use of his lance and bow. Ibn Akhī Hizām indicated other methods of managing a drawn sword while using a bow or lance, though he conceded that putting the sword back into its sheath until it was needed remained the best solution. The quickest way for a horseman to dispose of his sword if he had to suddenly revert to use of his bow was to hang it on his right arm by means of its 'loop', *dhu'āba* or sword knot.<sup>134</sup>

The two major concerns expressed by Ibn Akhī Hizām regarding the grip of a sword-hilt was that it should be solidly constructed and that it provided a firm hold for the sword bearer. In order to strengthen the grip the Arabs would coat it with wet camel neck tendons called *'ilbā'*, hence the term *sayf mu'allab*, and wrap it with coarse grainy leather or *safan* for a firm hold. Ibn Akhī Hizām cautioned a horseman never to use a sword with a simple cylindrical grip, lest it twisted in his hand when striking. Instead the horseman was urged always to use a multi-faceted grip or even one with four sides (*qā'im murabba'*). Furthermore the grip must be neither too massive nor too slim for the man's grasp.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Archaeological evidence from this period is extremely limited, though a few complete or partial sword hilts do survive (figs. XII-26a, XII-39, XII-40-42, XII-97, XII-108 and XII-121).

<sup>132</sup> See for example, Ibn Sīdā, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>133</sup> Al-Ṣabī, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>134</sup> Ibn Akhī Hizām, *op. cit.*, p. 771-772.



Archaeological evidence shows that the standard length of the tangs of 'Abbāsid and Mamlūk swords and sabres was about 10 cms, and that the standard length of the overall hilt varied between 14 and 16 cm including the pommel. The minimum length recorded for a hilt was 12 cm, which is that of an eighth/fourteenth-century double-edged Syrian-Mamlūk sword kept in the Military Museum in Istanbul (inv. no. 2340). The maximum length was 20.5 cm, being that of a *qaljūrī* hilt which was almost certainly made in the royal Mamlūk *zardakhāna* as a gift for the Ottoman conqueror of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmet II (Topkapi Museum inv. no. 1/90). However, this was an exceptionally long hilt of an exceptional ceremonial *qaljūrī*. The double-handed cavalry sword or sabre was extremely unusual in the Muslim lands. In fact the horseman was never supposed to use both hands when striking with a sword, mace or war-axe in the *mêlée* of battle, lest he lose control of his horse. The bow and the lance were the only weapons which a cavalryman was trained to use with both hands while at the same time covering himself and controlling his horse. This also applied to foot soldiers, including those armed only with a sword and shield (*aṣḥāb al-suyūf*) who formed a distinct corps within the 'Abbāsid army during the third/ninth century. Nevertheless if a soldier, on certain limited and well-defined occasions such as the act of beheading, had to use both hands when striking, he should wrap one hand over the other while gripping the hilt (*yajma'u yadayhi*), then strike. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that there is no evidence to suggest the existence of swords exclusively for decapitation during the 'Abbāsid period. Indeed, I have found no direct evidence that the awesome and weird 'executioner sword', often imagined as a double handed weapon, was known to the 'Abbāsids.

This was probably because the function of executioner was itself never clearly established. Guards, servants, *ghilmān* or any member of the military force, including commanders, used their personal swords or sabres if obliged to undertake this task. On the other hand, the skill of decapitating an enemy, or any one sentenced to death, swiftly with a single stroke was part of military training, as shown in Ibn Akhi Hizām's treatise.<sup>136</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr mentioned, however, that during the Fāṭimid New Year procession, ten swords intended for decapitation were carried by *ṣibyān al-rikāb* in red and yellow silk bags with long tufted tassels. They were called *suyūf al-dam* or 'blood swords'.<sup>137</sup> The fact that these so-called 'blood swords' were not described by an otherwise highly informed and meticulous contemporary observer like Ibn al-Ṭuwayr was probably because they were basically ordinary swords which had nothing special about them. Certainly, they inspired more fear when shrouded in their elaborate parade bags than they would have if nakedly exposed. Nor were special execution swords known under the Mamlūks.

Hilts were made entirely or partly of iron, bronze, steel, silver or gold. The grip might be also made of horn which was a readily available and inexpensive material, or of a decorative wood like ebony, or of ivory, crystal (*balūr majrūd*) or a variety of semi-precious and hard stones. Gold and silver inlay was frequently applied to such surfaces. However, enamelled silver and gold hilts, though not rare, were a recognized sign of opulence and refinement. Jewelled grips indicated, of course, the highest degree of wealth and prestige. Though not common, they were also far from rare. Nor were grips made of the very finest jewels exceptional. The ones that were supposed to be exceptional were those made from one piece of a precious stone. Recorded supposed examples included the one-piece emerald and the one-piece ruby grips found in the treasure-house of the 'Abbāsid Turkish commander Bajkam who died in 329/941.<sup>138</sup> However, when we delve deeper into the sophistication and astonishing wealth of the empire and dynasty of Banū al-'Abbās during the third/ninth century, we soon discover that even the one-piece

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 76b.

<sup>137</sup> Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *op. cit.*, p. 165; and cf. Al-Maqrīzī, *Musawwadat al-mawā'iz* . . . , *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Rashīd Ibn al-Zubayr, *op. cit.*, p. 231.



emerald and one-piece ruby sword grips were really not that exceptional. 'Abbāsid philologists stressed that a blade or *naṣl* should never be called a sword unless it was crowned with a hilt and, as the Arabs say, only peerless jewels are good enough for a crown.

The term *al-suyūf al-muḥallāt*, or 'decorated swords', emerged during the period of 'Abbāsid rule. It was considered to include three categories, the first of which was that of 'jewelled swords' or *al-suyūf al-mujawhara*. These were described as being adorned with jewels 'all over', though in reality such jewels were only applied to the hilt, scabbard and baldric or sword-belt; never to the blade. Variations in the quality of such swords reflected the quality of the jewels themselves, only the best being given to high ranking 'Abbāsid dignitaries. The second category of 'decorated swords' had a mixture of jewels and gold inlay; the jewels usually being confined to the pommel of the hilt. The blade might also sometimes have a small inlaid gold inscription. The third category of 'decorated swords' had the simplest decoration which was only in silver. Yet paradoxically they were regarded as having the highest moral value. They were given by the Caliph himself to a man who was to be entrusted with an important military command, or the governorship of a province, and was thus considered to represent the Caliph himself. This special status was reflected in his sword which, like those of the Caliph, was only decorated with silver and not with gold or jewels. Indeed in 'Abbāsid ceremonial and symbolism, gilded weaponry and very magnificent clothing were the mark of the senior servant, whereas plain silvered weaponry and sombre dress distinguished the ruler. Gold and jewelry were honourable as gifts from the Caliph but did not indicate that the recipient had been invested as the Caliph's personal representative. The silver decoration on investiture swords was not apparently applied as an overall surface layer. Instead it was applied to the hilt, scabbard and sword-belt or baldric in a system called *raṣī'a*, meaning 'external' or 'applied to the surface', and created a pattern of small geometric shapes (fig. XII-41a-c). Meanwhile the blade was invariably of the highest quality.





1



2

## XII. al-Sarraf. Close Combat Weapons in the Early 'Abbāsid Period

XII-1 Coptic limestone relief carving, probably illustrating the story of Joseph being taken to Egypt by a Midianite; Egypt, sixth century AD. As was traditional, the Midianite is shown as an Arab bedouin. He carries what might be a long-headed mace or a very short-hafted but long-bladed 'spear'. It is also interesting to note that he rides side-saddle, which was a characteristic given to presumed early Islamic or Arab figures in a wall-painting from Pendzhikent in Transoxania. (Coptic Museum, inv. 8001, Cairo)

XII-2 Horsemen attacking a fortress on a silver-gilt plate found at Malo-Amkovaya near Perm in western Siberia. The origins of this plate remain a matter of debate. Some scholars suggested that it was made in the third/ninth or fourth/tenth-century Semirechye region of what is now Kazakhstan while others consider it more likely to have been made in a superficially Islamized Turkish region of Transoxania. The uppermost cavalryman carried a double-headed axe. One of the central pair of riders has a non-symmetrical mace and one of the lower pair has a simple round-headed mace. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)]





3



4

- XII-3 A painted ceramic bowl from the Nishāpūr area of eastern Iran, probably third/ninth century. The peculiar objects carried by several horsemen on such Nishāpūr ceramics have sometimes been identified as 'flowers', with the horsemen themselves being associated with a Zoroastrian religious festival. But it is also possible that the objects are highly stylized representations of some form of mace. (Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. C.294-1987, London)
- XII-4 Bronze mace-head of the elongated form, Iran sixth/twelfth or seventh/thirteenth century. (Private collection)





5



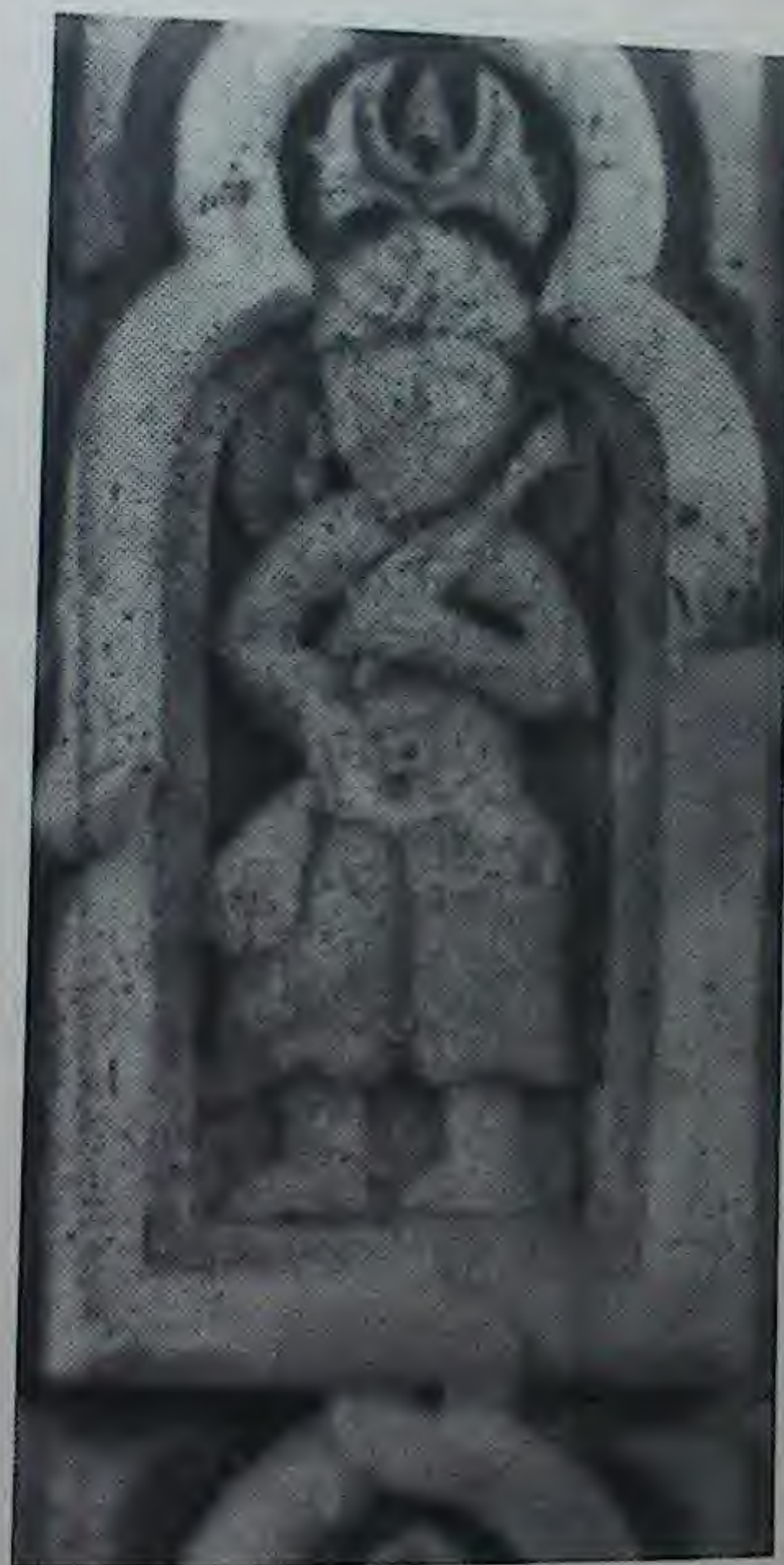
6

- XII-5 Carved wooden panel from Egypt, Fāṭimid period, probably fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century. The short-handled weapon resting on the man's shoulder is almost certainly a form of mace (see also figs. XII-1, XII-6 and XII-55a-c). (Musée du Louvre, Paris)
- XII-6 The very long-headed or long-bladed but equally short-handled weapon carried by the man in this carved wooden panel from the doors of the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth-century Fāṭimid Caliphal Palace in Cairo may again be a form of mace, though on this occasion it is as likely to be a short spear. Note that he also has a very large round shield on his back. (Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo)





8a



8b



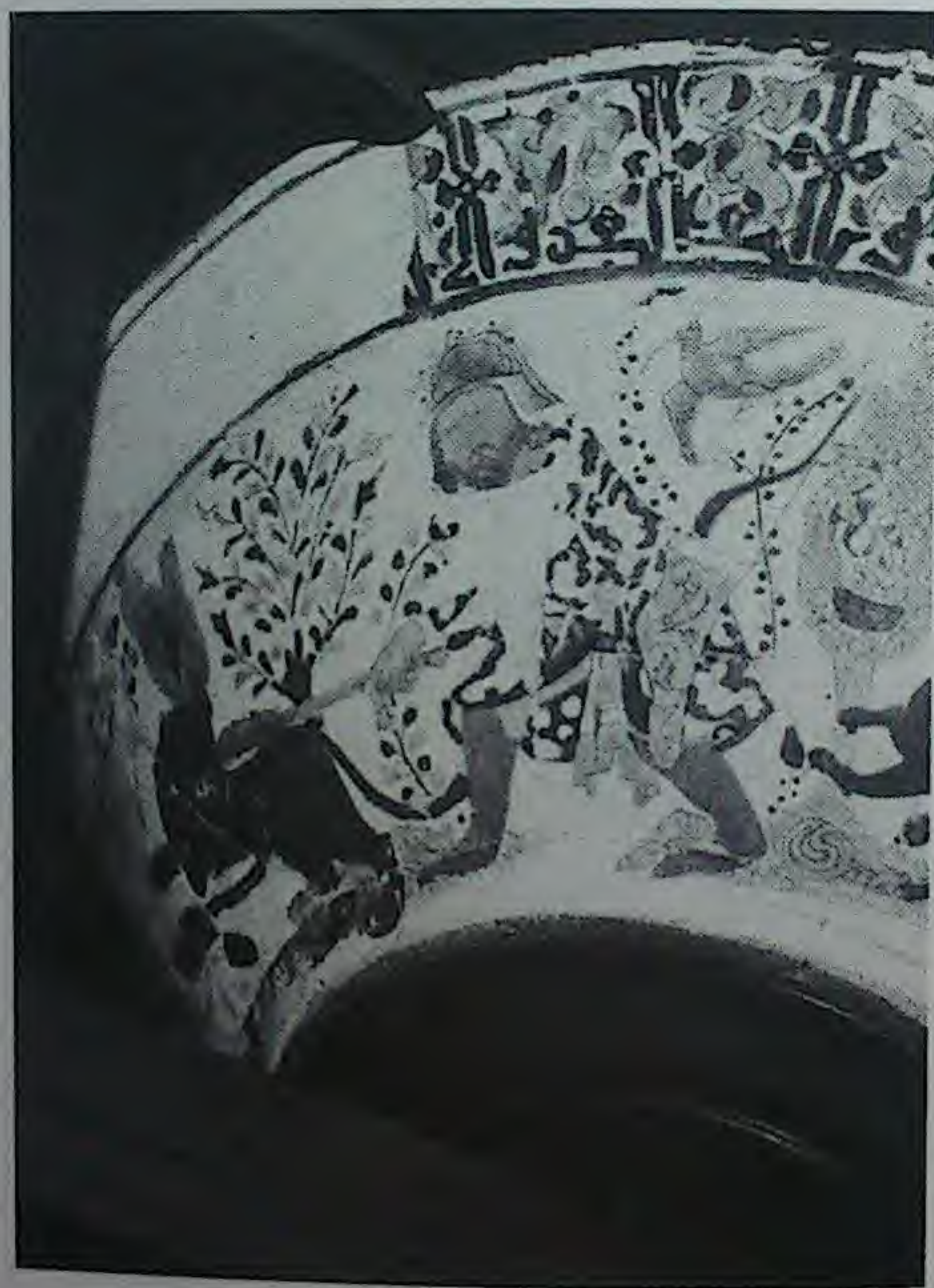
8c

- XII-7 Ceramic figurine from Qāshān, western Iran, early seventh/thirteenth century. The rider is represented as a member of the Saljūq Turkish military élite and the weapon resting on his right shoulder is almost certainly intended to be a form of mace. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. Lewisohn 54.152.2, New York)
- XII-8 a-c Amongst the military or courtly figures carved on the stone arch from Jū Kummit, in the Jabal Sinjar in north-western Iraq, are three who carry what are probably slightly different forms of mace. (Iraqi National Museum, Baghdad)





9a



9b

XII-9

- a-b Two forms of mace, the non-symmetrical 'animal-headed' and a version of the elongated type, are shown in greater detail on the outside of a very large *minai*-ware ceramic bowl from early to mid-seventh/thirteenth century Iran. It is worth noting that the animal-headed type is, as was usual, placed in the hands of a senior figure – in this case a hero or prince. (Freer Gallery of Art, inv. 43.3, Washington, USA)





10



11

XII-10 This little-known manuscript page was made either in *Shīrāz* in southern Iran or in Islamic northern India in the mid-eighth/fourteenth century. The top register shows a number of weapons. In addition to a trident and a sword in its scabbard on the right, there are two other objects, one of which might be a mace with a head terminating in a spike and, on the far left, what could be an 'arrow-guide' for use with a bow. (*Mu'nis al-Ahrār*, Museum of Art, no. 45.385, Cleveland, USA)

XII-11 The head of a bronze war-hammer or specialized mace, third century AD. It is not clear whether this weapon, from the Roman frontier fortress of Dura Europos overlooking the river Euphrates, belonged to a member of the Syro-Roman garrison or to a soldier of the attacking Sassanian army. It is clearly not within the normal Roman armoury and it probably reflects a very long-established Middle Eastern military tradition which may well have survived into the Islamic period. (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven)

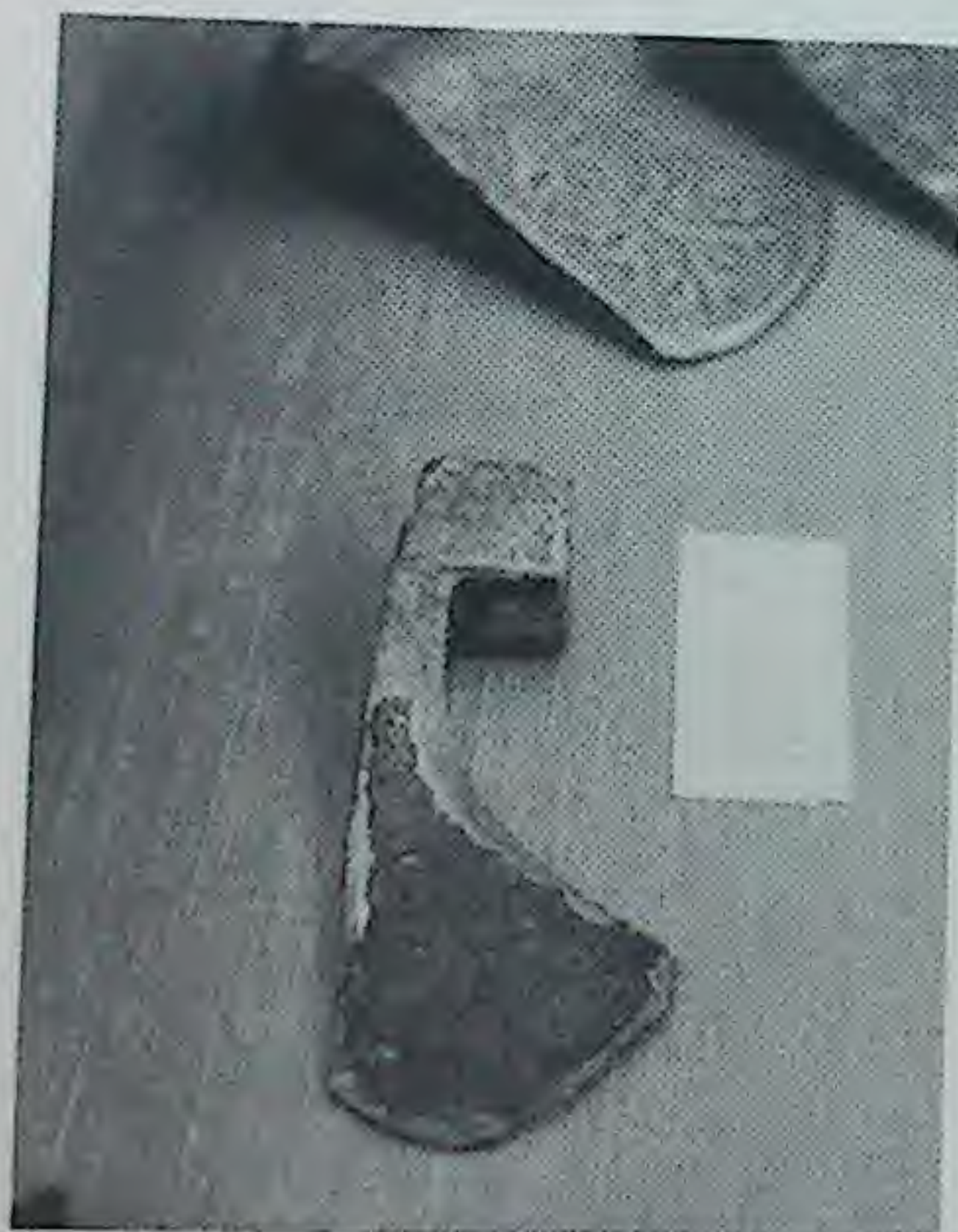




12a



12b



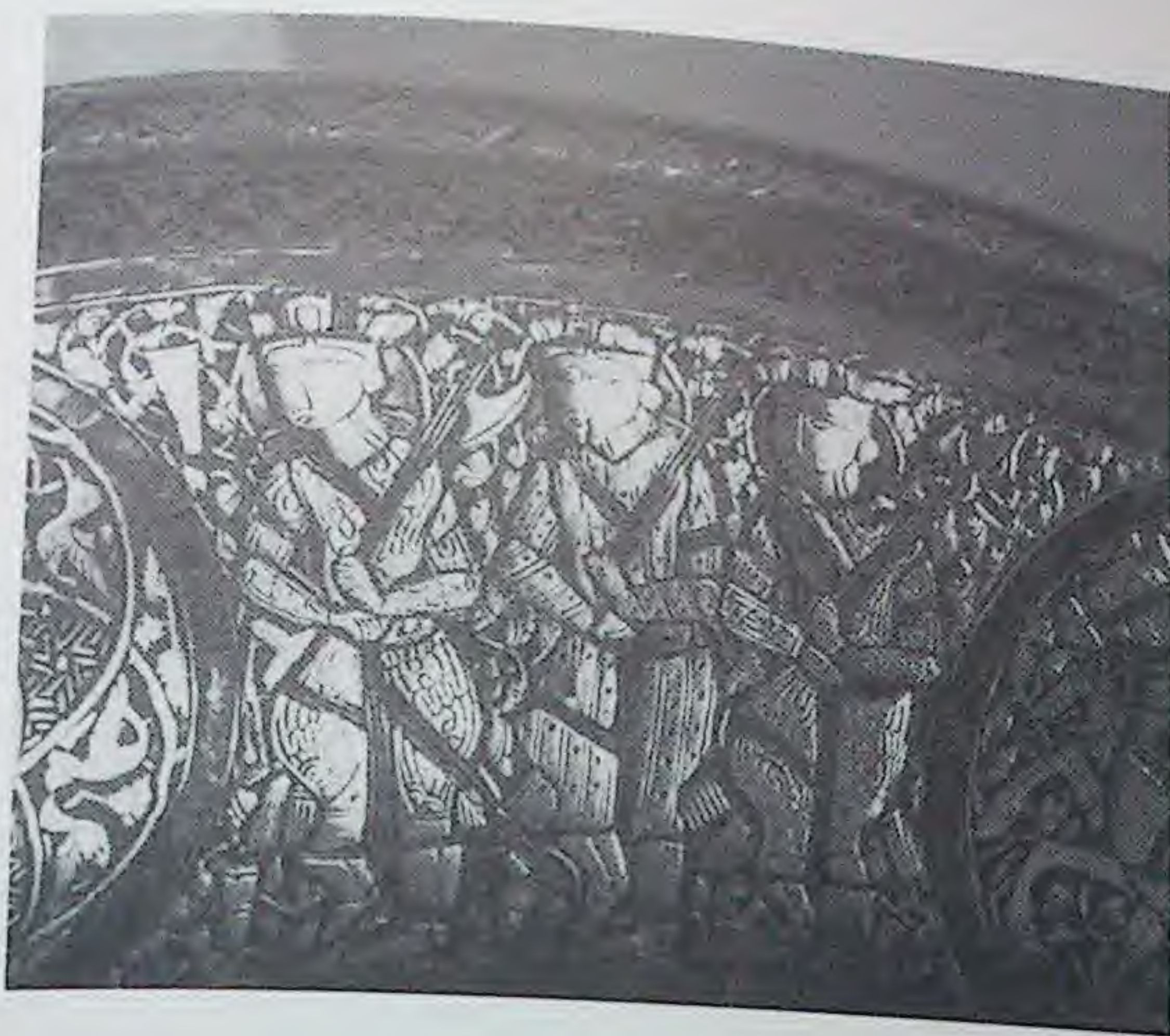
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14

- XII-12 a-b Soldiers armed with war-axes in a Buddhist stone relief carving of 'The Departure of Sakyamuni from the Palace', Gandharan second or third century AD from north-western India. Pictorial evidence suggests that war-axes were widespread in the pre-Islamic Sassanian Iranian Empire and in Iranian influenced regions further east. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA)
- XII-13 Bronze war-axe inlaid with silver decoration, from Syria, sixth/twelfth or seventh/thirteenth century. (Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. M. 145-1919, London).
- XII-14 A painted ceramic bowl from the Nishāpūr area of eastern Iran, third/ninth or fourth/tenth century. On this occasion the horseman wields a double-headed axe. (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)





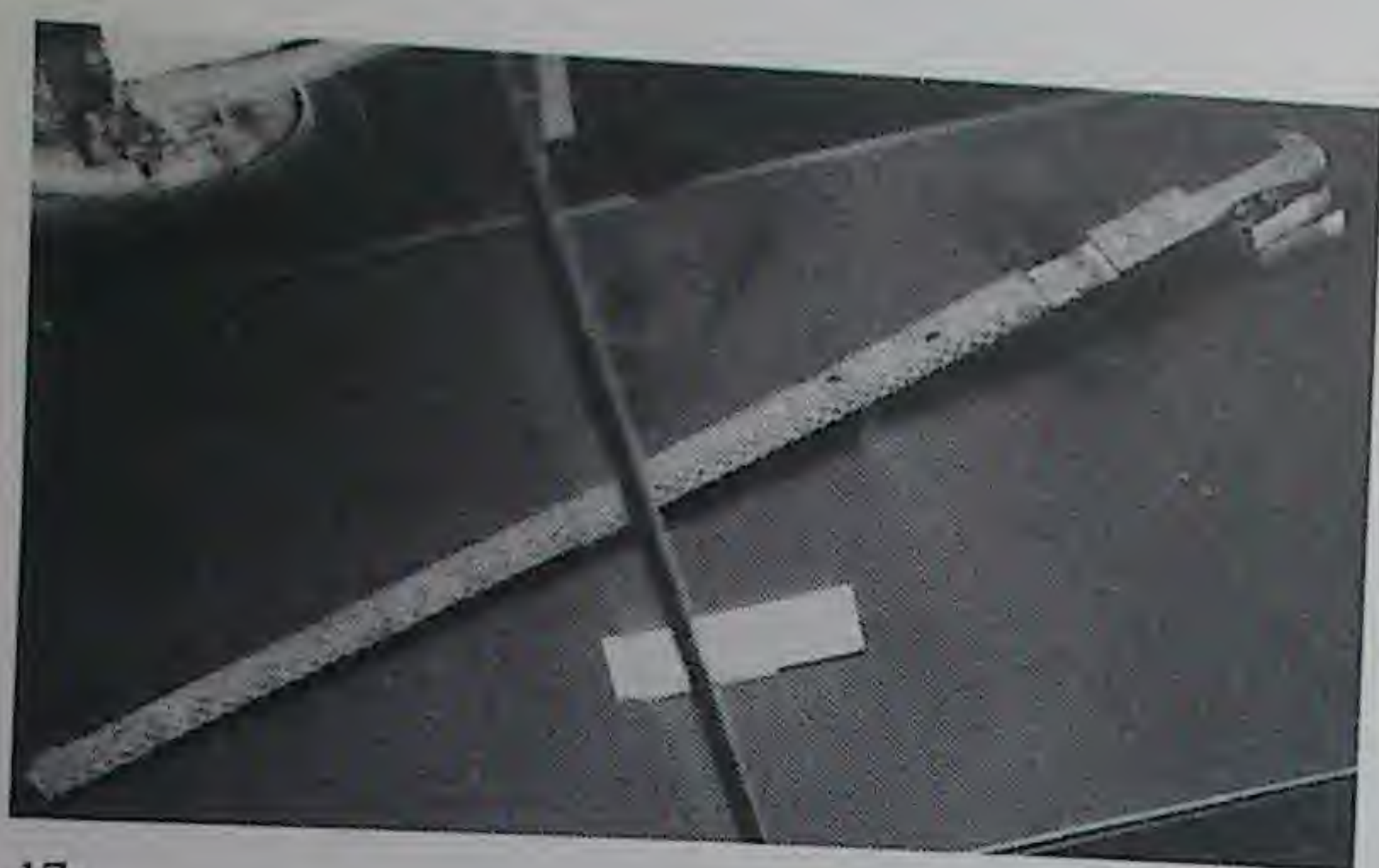
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16

- XII-15 Three guards on a large inlaid bronze bowl from late seventh/thirteenth century Mamlūk Egypt or Syria, dedicated to Baybars. The men on the left and right both carry single-bladed axes. (Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. 740-1898, London)
- XII-16 Carved stone relief of huntsmen and a lion, from Zāfār in the Yarīm region of Yemen, third century AD. The figure on the far right is armed with a short sword which appears to be slightly curved or to have only one cutting edge. (Archaeological Museum, Sana'a, Yemen)

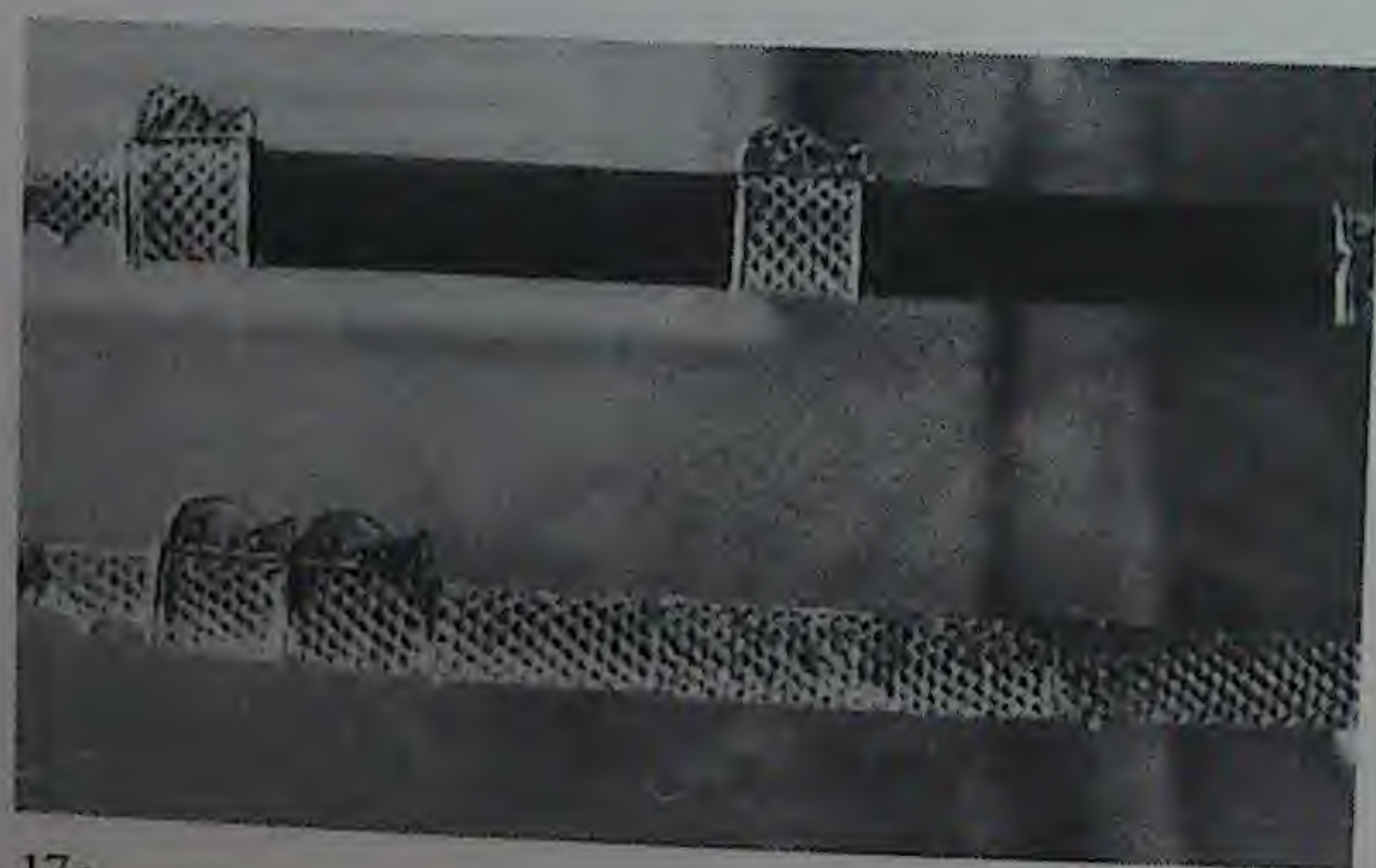




17a



17b



17c



18

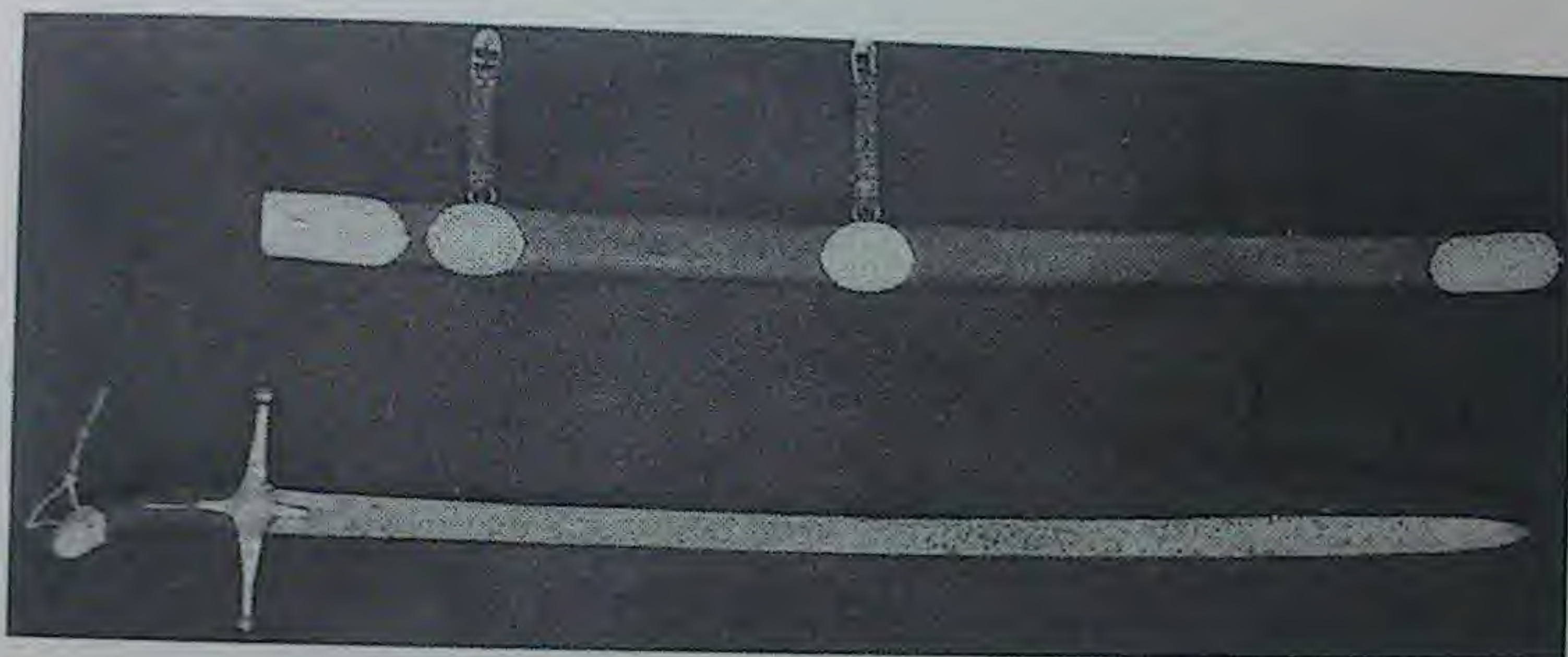
- XII-17 a-c Three of several surviving highly decorated straight swords with single-edges, highly decorated metal-covered scabbards and a distinctive form of hilt. They are believed to be late Sassanian or to be from the very early Islamic period in Iran or Transoxania. (a-b: Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran; c: Musée du Louvre, Paris)
- XII-18 There is considerable disagreement about the origins of this silver-gilt plate showing a horse-archer with a long straight sword whose hilt indicates that it was probably single-edged. His use of stirrups suggests a date no earlier than the first/seventh century, and the plate might come from Sassanian or early Islamic Iran, or from some immediately neighbouring region. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)



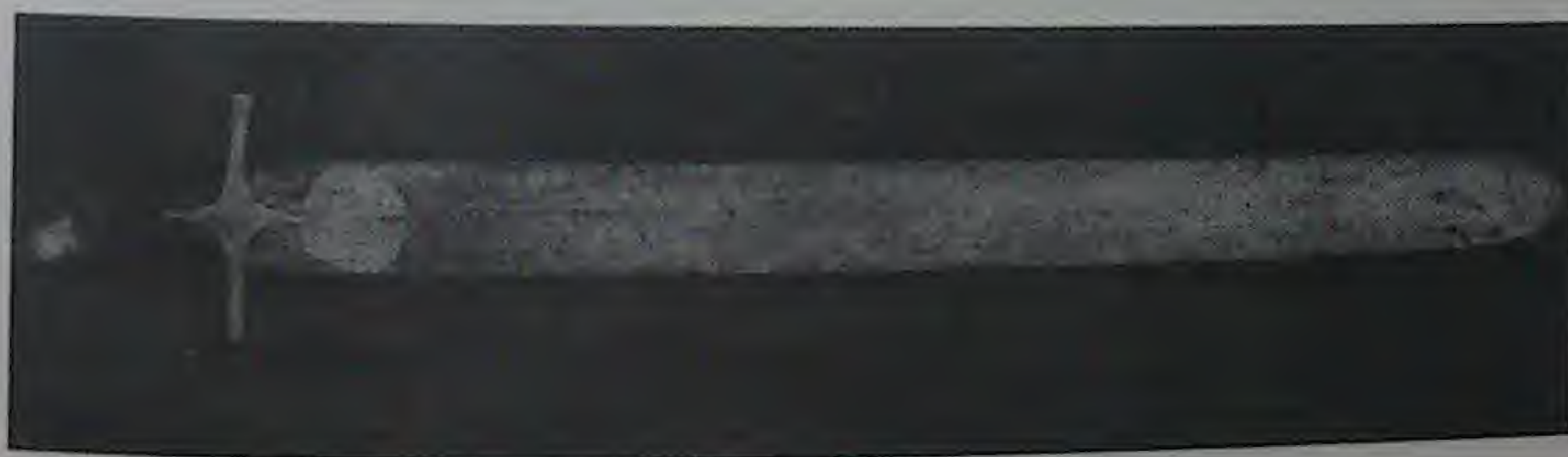
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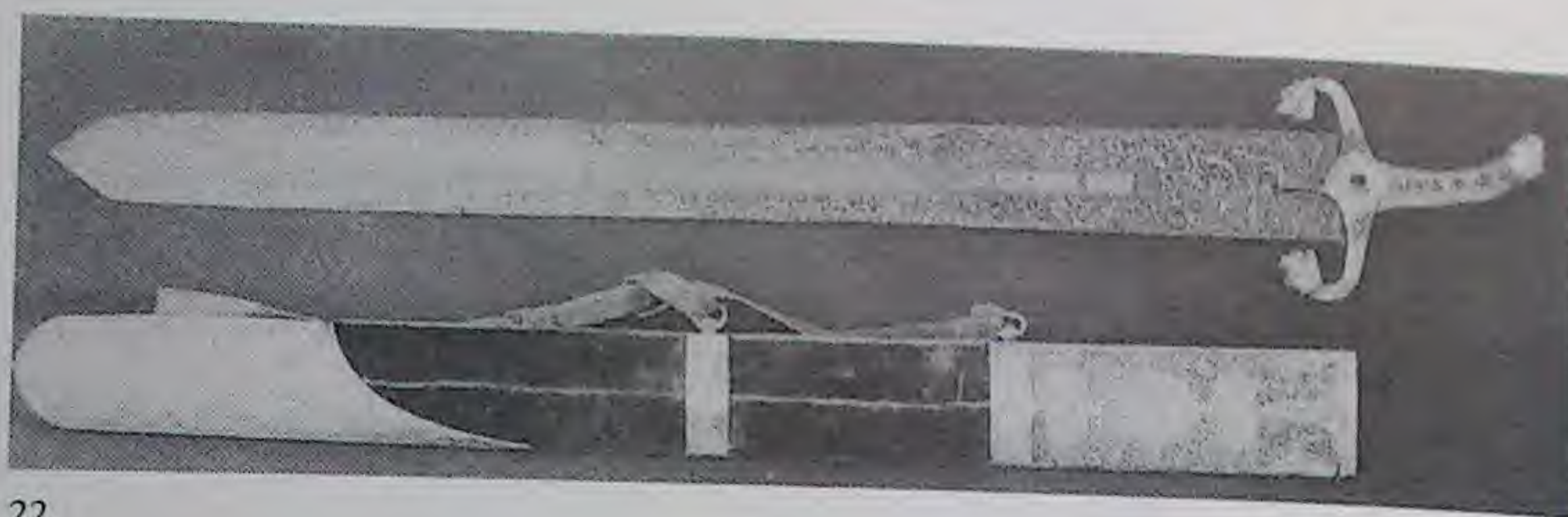


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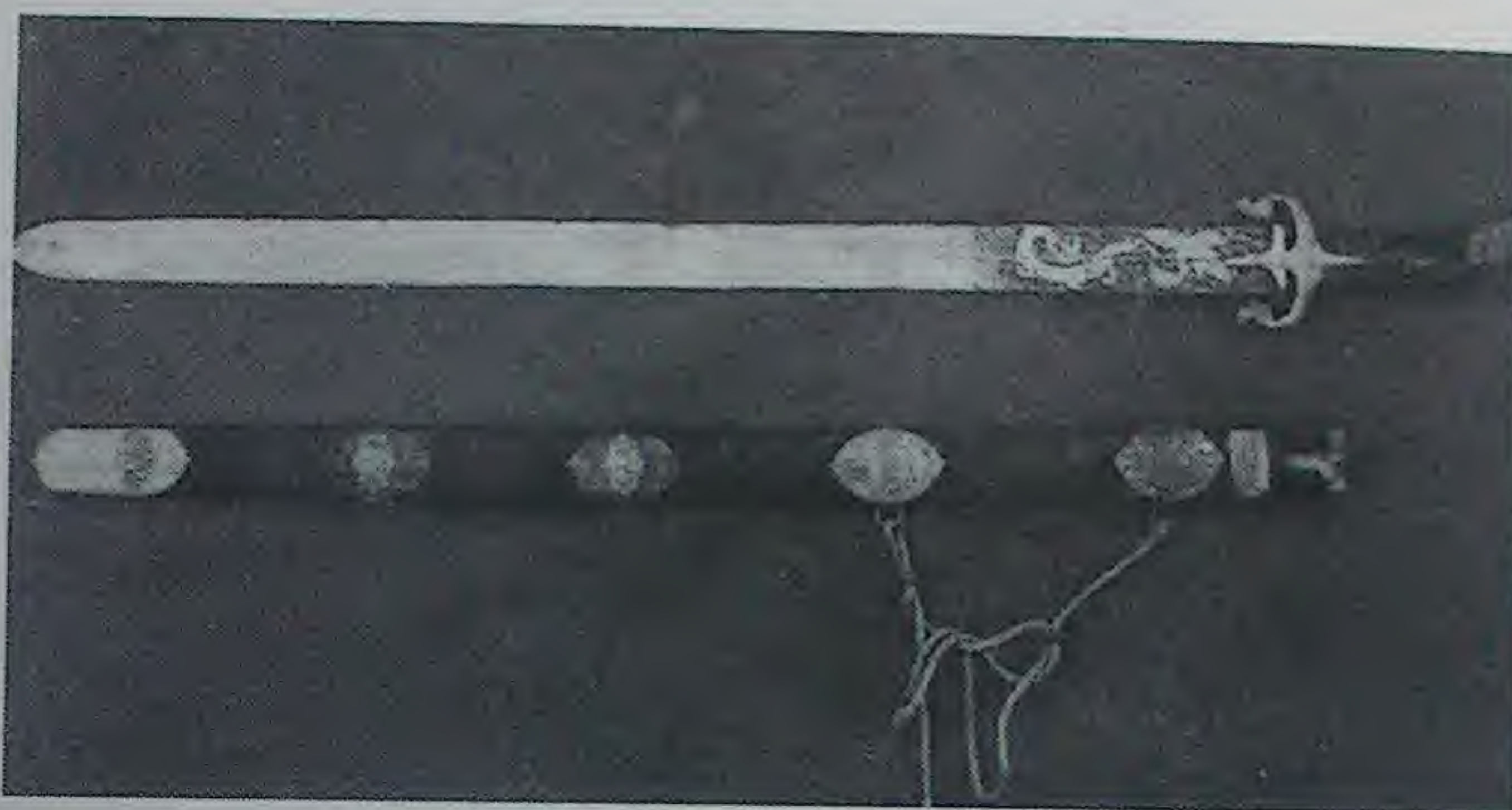


- XII-19 Part of a wall-painting from Afrasiab, first/seventh or early second/eighth century, showing a camel-riding figure with a red face and wearing a head-band. He is sometimes thought to represent an early Islamic Arab. Hanging from his belt is a long straight sword whose scabbard is supported by an old-fashioned scabbard-slide (see also fig. XII-109). (Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand, Uzbekistan)
- XII-20 A sabre which is said to have belonged to the Prophet Muḥammad. (Topkapi Museum Reliquary, inv. 21/130, Istanbul)
- XII-21 A sword which is said to have belonged to the Caliph 'Alī. (Topkapi Museum Reliquary, inv. 21/138, Istanbul)





22



23



24

- XII-22 A sword which is said to have belonged to the Caliph Uthmān. (Topkapi Museum Reliquary, inv. 2/3775, Istanbul)
- XII-23 A sword which is said to have belonged to the Ja'far al-Tayyār, first/seventh century. (Topkapi Museum Reliquary, inv. 21/143, Istanbul)
- XII-24 A sword which is said to have belonged to the Zayn al-Abdin, first/seventh century. (Topkapi Museum Reliquary, inv. 21/139, Istanbul)





25



26a



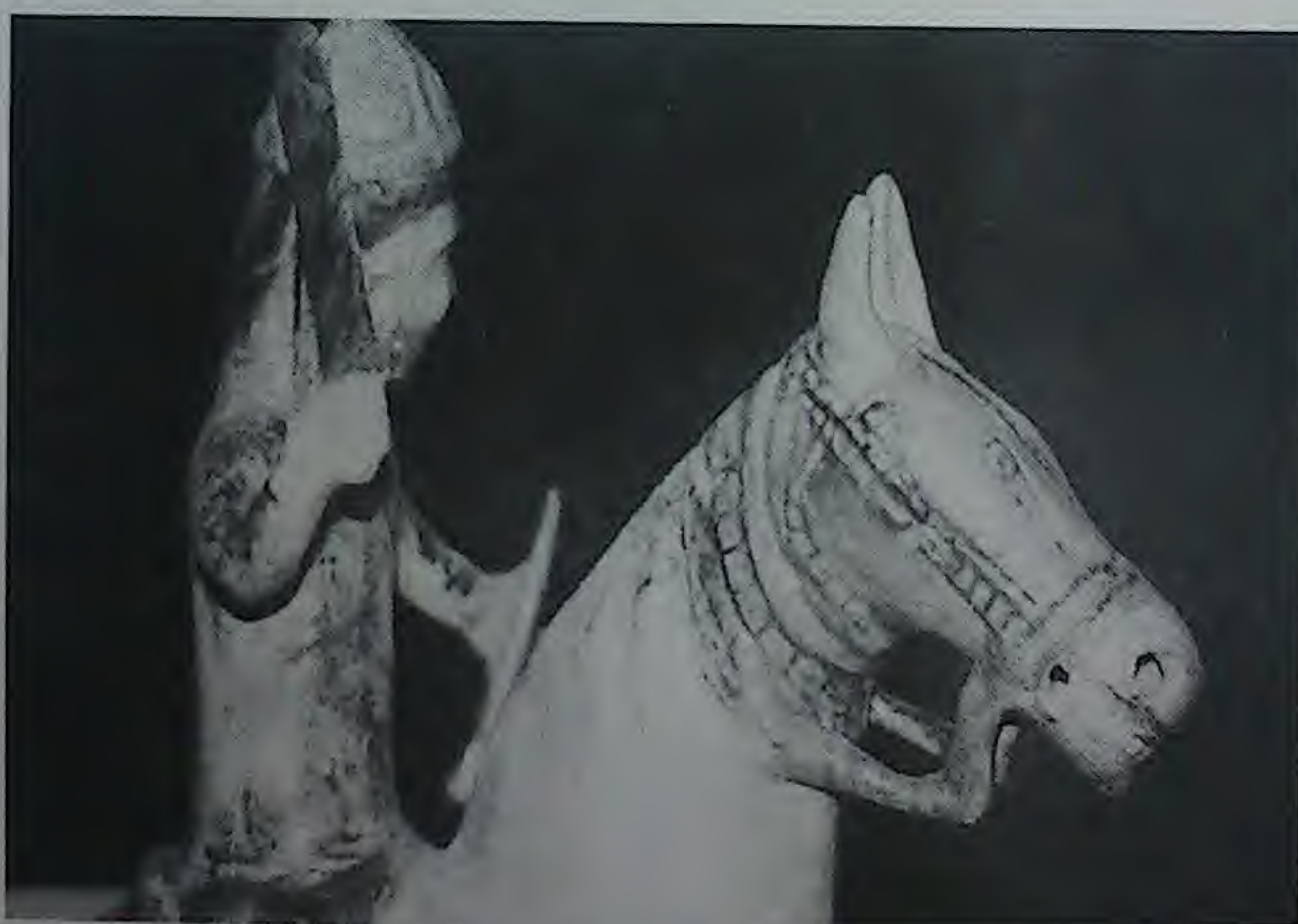
26b

- XII-25 A gold coin of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Muqtadir, 295/908 to 320/932, showing the Caliph with a long straight sword (see also fig. XII-117). (Iraqi National Museum, Baghdad)
- XII-26 a-b The bronze quillons, upper scabbard mount and chape of a slightly curved sabre found in Nishāpūr in eastern Iran. The archaeological context was third/ninth to fourth/tenth century (see also fig. XII-103). (Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 40.170.168, New York)





27

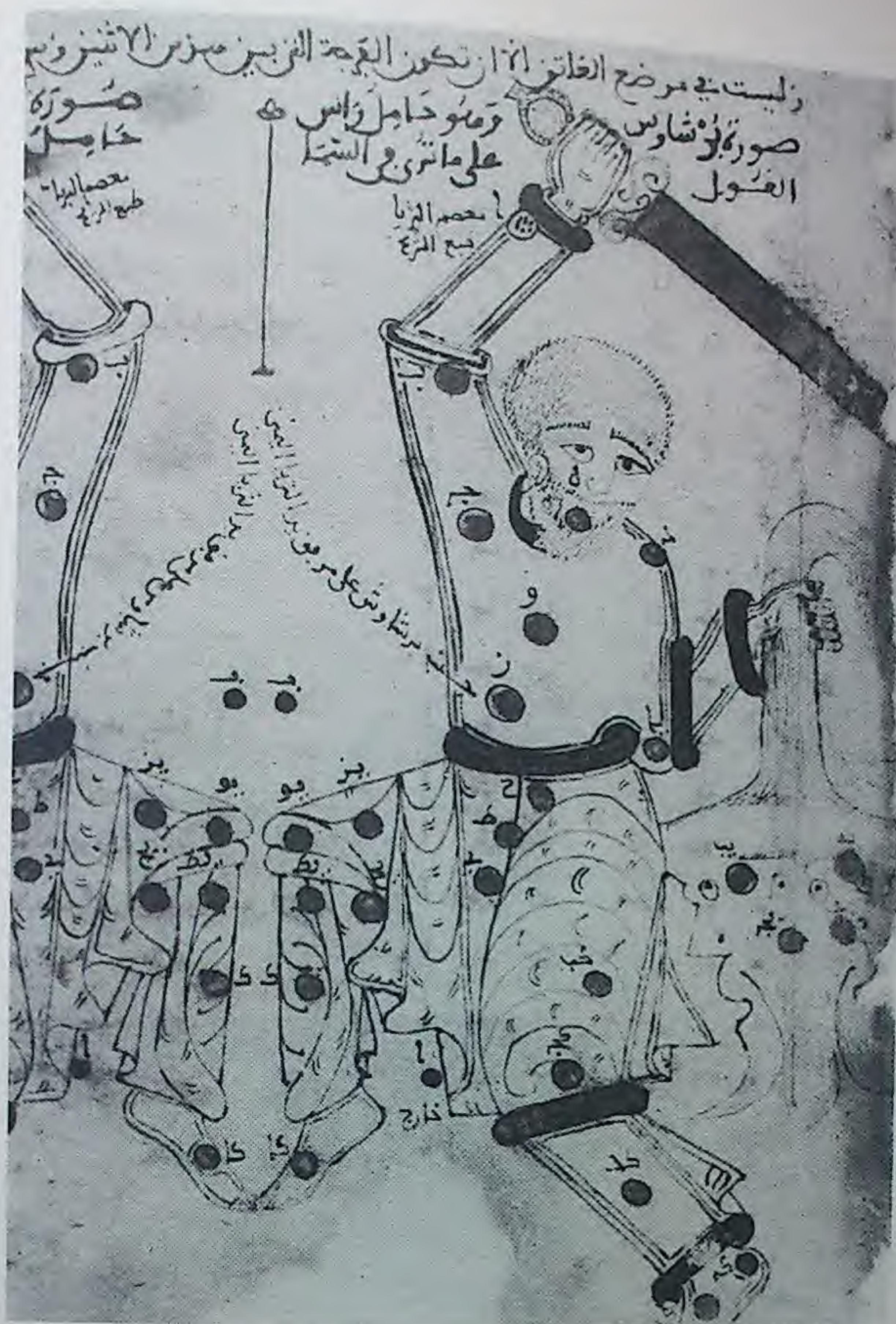


28

- XII-27 This painted ceramic plate might also have come from Nishāpūr. It shows an armed man who, judging by his boots, is a dismounted cavalryman with a round shield and a straight broad-bladed sword. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 66.176, New York)
- XII-28 One of the most remarkable medieval Islamic ceramic statuettes was found at Raqqa in north-eastern Syria and probably dates from the sixth/twelfth century. It represents a horseman with a small round shield and a straight double-edged sword fighting a serpent. (National Museum, Damascus)



29



30



- XII-29 A broad straight sword is also given to the figure of Perseus in a copy of al-Sūfi's *Book of Fixed Stars*. It was made in Sabta (now Spanish-held Ceuta in northern Morocco) in AH 621/AD 1224. (Biblioteca Apostolica, Ms. Ross. 1033, Vatican)
- XII-30 Part of the blade of a sabre found at Nezin in the Ukraine. It still bears the remains of an Arabic inscription along with decorative patterns, and dates from between AD 1150 and 1240 (see also fig. XII-104). (State Historical Museum, Chernihiv, Ukraine)





31



32

- XII-31 The two soldiers in this scene from the 'Miracles of Christ' come from an Arabic Gospel made in Cairo in 647/1249-50. They both carry long, straight swords with non-tapering blades. Their costume and headgear indicate that they were based upon Mamlūk soldiers. (Bibliothèque de l'Institut Catholique, Ms. Copte-Arabe 1, Paris)
- XII-32 Amongst the figures in the Umayyad wall-paintings at Qusayr 'Amra in the Jordanian desert is one who is believed to represent an Umayyad prince or even the Caliph himself. It was painted around AD 740 and this figure is notable because the scabbard of his long straight sword is hung from a baldric, exactly as is shown on many early Umayyad coins (see fig. XII-107). (*in situ* Qusayr 'Amra, Jordan)





33



34

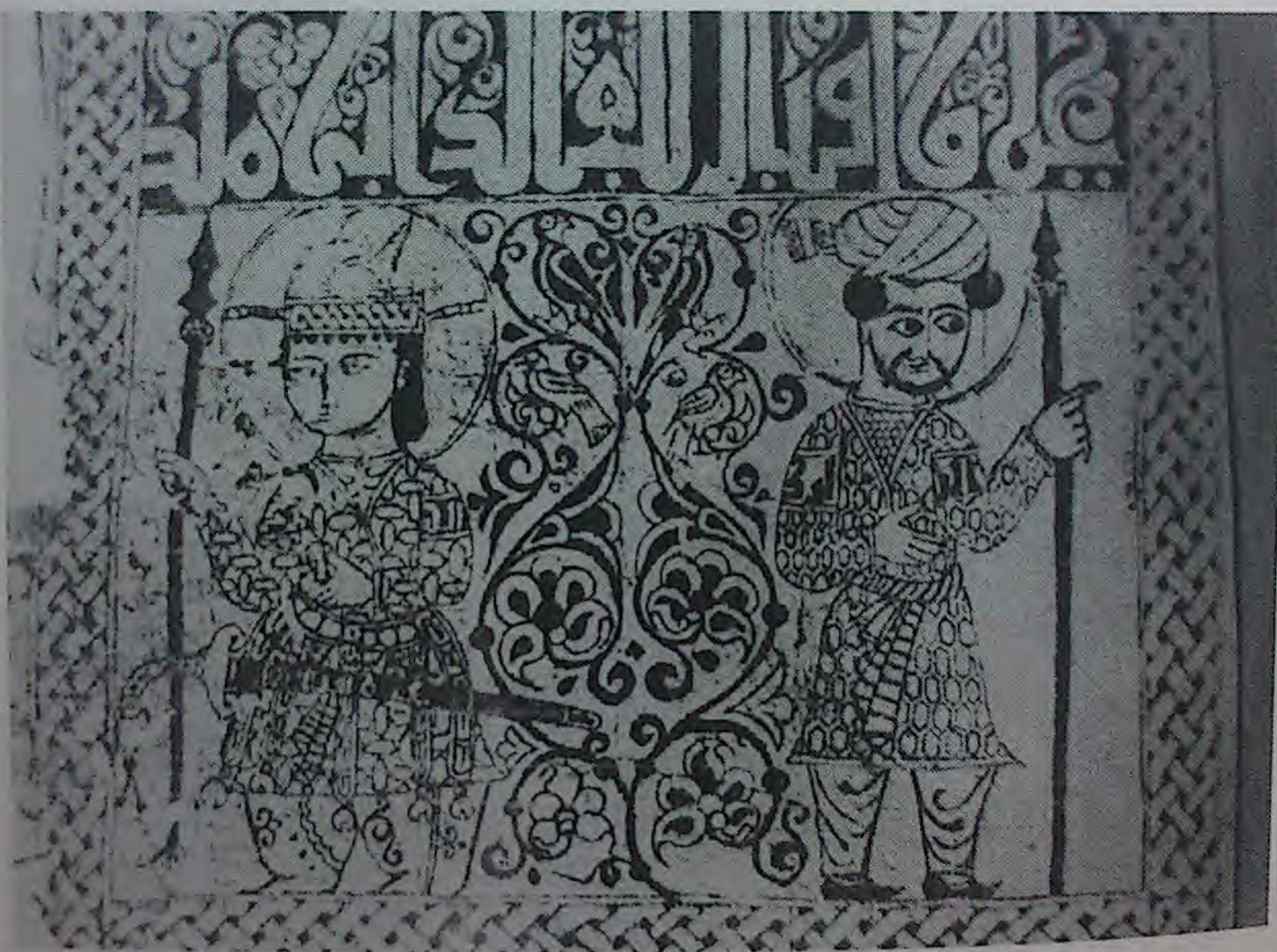
- XII-33 The Georgian relief carving of St. Eustace on the stone alter-screen from a church at Tsebelda represents the saint as a turbanned horseman. He apparently wears a full mail hauberk and his long straight sword is hung from a baldric rather than a belt, as was otherwise normal in Georgian art. These features strongly suggest that the saint is equipped in an early Islamic Arab or western Iranian style, while features of the horse's saddle and harness point to a third/ninth or fourth/tenth century date rather than the sixth to seventh century AD date usually given to this carving. (S.N. Djanashiya State Museum, Tblisi, Georgia)
- XII-34 Abū Zaid and al-Hārith as two Arab camel riders in a copy of the *Maqamat* by al-Harīrī, made in Mamlūk Syria in the late seventh/thirteenth century. (British Library, Ms. Or. 9718, f. 173r, London)



35



36



- XII-35 A huntsman with a hawk on his wrist and a slightly curved sabre in a scabbard hung by straps from a sword-belt. The painting comes from Nishāpūr and dates from the third/ninth or more likely from the fourth/tenth century. (Museum of Islamic Art, Tehran)
- XII-36 This remarkable ink drawing on a fragment of paper from Fustāt in Cairo, Egypt, dates from the fifth/eleventh or early sixth/twelfth century Fāṭimid period. It appears to illustrate a Turkish *ghulam* soldier on the left and an Arab or Berber soldier on the right. The former has an essentially straight sword, though it also has an angled hilt. (Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo)



37



38



XII-37

A lustre-ware ceramic plate from Egypt, Fāṭimid fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth centuries. The mounted huntsman has a basically straight sword but this has a notably angled grip, indicating that there was only one cutting edge. The scabbard is also hung by straps from his sword-belt. (Freer Gallery of Art, no. 41.12, Washington, USA)

XII-38

A lustre-ware ceramic bowl, 'Abbāsid Iraq or Iran, third/ninth or fourth/tenth century. Though very stylized, this picture of a soldier with a banner is important because it also shows a broad, straight non-tapering sword (the apparent curvature is due to the shape of the bowl) which seems to have a 'ring-shaped' pommel (see also figs. XII-118 to XII-122). (Museum of Fine Arts, no. 57.684, Boston, USA)





39



40

- XII-39 The bronze hilt of a double-edged and probably straight-bladed sword from the wreck of an Islamic merchant ship off the south-western coast of Turkey. Analysis of the metal indicates that its lead content was mined in eastern Anatolia or western Iran while the decorative bird motif might reflect east Iranian or Indian cultural influence. The weapon was almost certainly made in an Islamic region close to where the metal was mined and it dates from the late fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh century. The similarities between the grip and a bronze object from immediately pre-Islamic Arabia are also notable (see fig. XII-115). (Bodrum Castle Museum, inv. GW 56, Bodrum, Turkey)
- XII-40 The engraved pommel and quillons of what was almost certainly a double-edged straight sword. It was probably made in Egypt, Syria or Iraq in the third/ninth or fourth/tenth century. The inscription on the quillons comes from Sura CXII of the Koran: 'Say He is God, One, God the Eternal; He brought not forth (a son), nor has he ever been brought forth (i.e. been born); Co-Equal with Him there has never been anyone.' This verse is a direct denial of Christian claims for the divinity of Jesus, indicating that the hilt of this sword was probably made in a context of conflict, probably against the Byzantine Empire. (ex-private collection; present whereabouts unknown)





41



42



43

XII-41

a-c One of two swords found in Martin's Cave in the Rock of Gibraltar. They date from the sixth/twelfth century and, although superficially European in appearance, they both have all-metallic hilts over tangs which broaden to discs at their ends. Such features indicate an Islamic origin (see also figs. XII-91 and XII-92). This particular sword also retains the remains of silver decoration consisting of spirals and geometric shapes which originally covered the whole pommel, grip and quillons. (British Museum, inv. 67.12.23.1, London)





42



42

- XII-42 The second sword found in Martin's Cave in Gibraltar has no surviving decoration but is structurally almost indential to the first. Both swords were found next to each other and have the same origins, probably having been made in a far western region of the Islamic world in the early or mid-sixth/twelfth century. (British Museum, inv. 67.12.23.2, London)
- XII-43 The abundantly illustrated Persian *Warqa wa Gulshāh* manuscript includes an astonishing variety of detailed representations of arms and armour. Its date and provenance remain a matter of debate, though late sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century western Iran, Azerbaijan or eastern Turkey seem most likely. In this picture of 'The night attack by Rabī Ibn Adnān' an unarmoured infantryman on the far right again carries a kite-shaped shield. These appear several times in the manuscript, but only in the hands of men on foot. (Topkapi Library, Ms. Haz. 841, f. 3/6a, Istanbul)





44a



44b



44c



44d



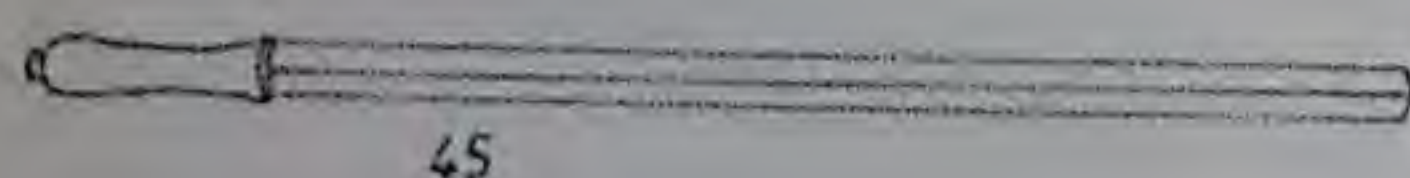
44e



44f

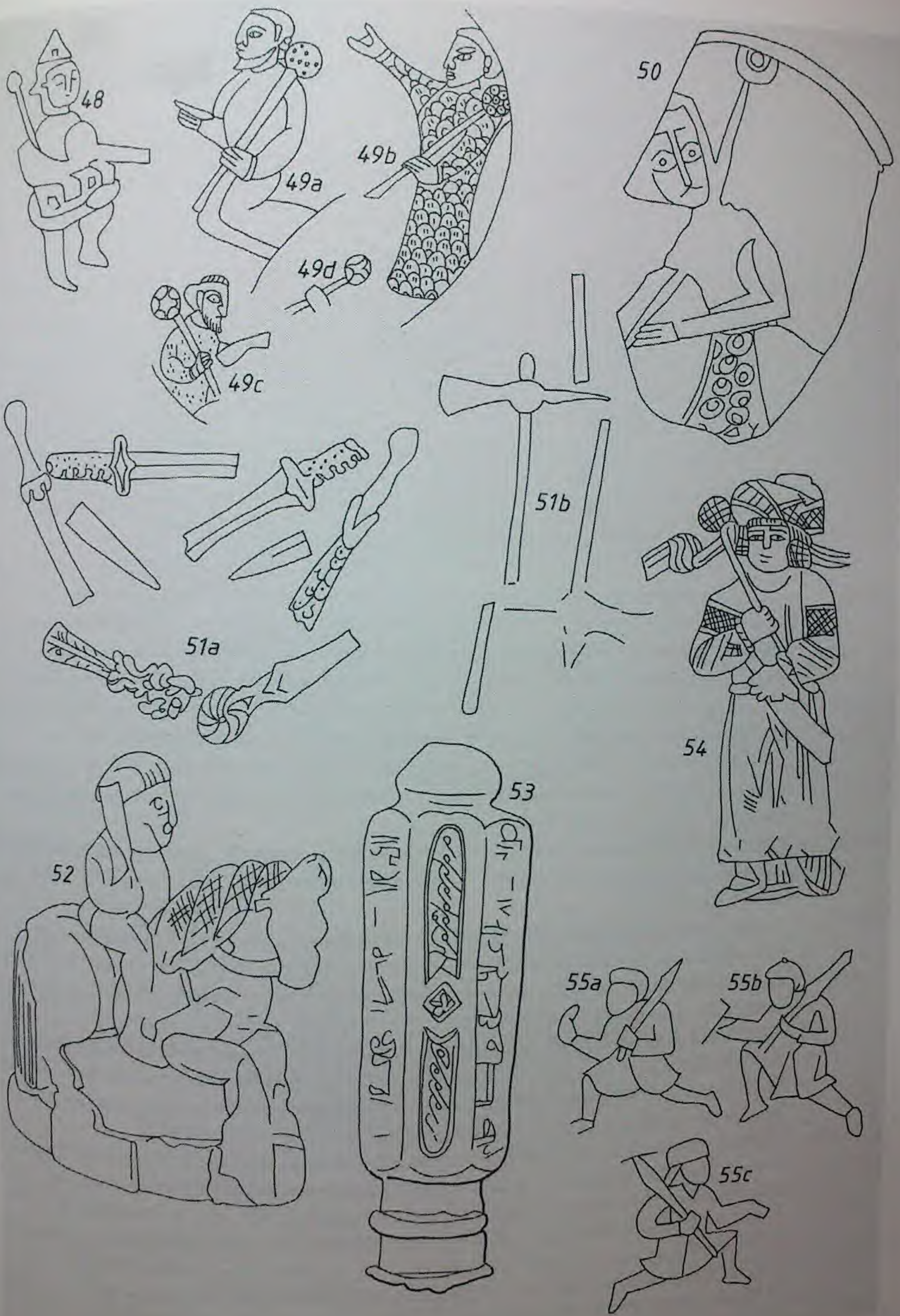
- XII-44 a-f Various military training exercises for soldiers on horseback and on foot are illustrated in a 'popular' Mamlūk *furūsiyya* manuscript which is a collection of selected extracta from various earlier treatises, made around AD 1470. It was attributed to Ibn Akhī Hizām though in fact only part of the manuscript was drawn from his works. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Arabe 2824, ff. 34r, 60v, 63r, 64r, 73r and 86v, Paris)
- a Combat between horsemen, one armed with a double-edged straight sword and one with a sabre (f. 34r).
  - b Exercise involving a man on foot and a cavalryman armed with a large axe (f. 60v).
  - c Exercise for men on foot wielding bamboo staves to represent swords or maces (f. 63r).
  - d Exercise for men on horseback wielding bamboo staves to represent swords or maces (f. 64r).
  - e Exercise to strengthen and perfect sword blows, in this case using sabres, against mounds of damp clay (f. 73r).
  - f Exercise in which a horseman makes repeated passes of a green reed, cutting off a specified section at each pass (f. 86v).





- XII-45 Tentative reconstruction of a form of a *mustawfī* iron staff. (Drawing by Shihab al-Sarraf)
- XII-46 a-b Top and side views of a tentative reconstruction of a large form of war-axe, based upon Mamlūk evidence and perhaps also used during the previous 'Abbāsid period. (Drawings by Shihab al-Sarraf)
- XII-47 a-d Tentative reconstructions of various forms of war-axe, as used during the 'Abbāsid period. (Drawings by Shihab al-Sarraf)
- XII-48 Here the Midianite who took Joseph to Egypt is armed with a simple mace, as illustrated in a first/seventh century Coptic textile from Egypt. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)
- XII-49 a-d Silver dish decorated with scenes from the Christian Nativity which was found near Perm-Molotov in Siberia. It is said to have been made in Syria or Palestine in the first/seventh century, though the stylized figures seem to date from a rather later period and were perhaps of Nestorian Christian origin, having been made in Iraq or Iran during the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. The shepherd (a), the angel at Christ's Tomb (b) and the soldiers at the Crucifixion (c-d) are all armed with substantial round-headed maces. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia)
- XII-50 A very similar form of long-hafted, large round-headed mace appears on a fragment of painted ceramic which came from late third/ninth or fourth/tenth century 'Abbāsid Iraq or, less likely, from Egypt. (Benaki Museum, inv. 227, Athens, Greece)
- XII-51 a-b The broken weapons which litter the ground between two 'heroic' combatants on a silver-gilt plate found at Kulagysh in Siberia include swords, maces, axes and an unclear weapon which might be another form of mace. The plate is almost certainly of Transoxanian origin, probably made during the immediately pre-Islamic period. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)
- XII-52 Ivory chess 'knight' from eastern Iran or Islamic Transoxania, probably third/ninth century. The weapon resting on his right shoulder could represent a large-bladed spear but seems more like a form of mace with an elongated head. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)
- XII-53 Bronze mace-head, Islamic, probably fourth/tenth century. It might be the earliest surviving example of this form of weapon. (Furusiyya Art Foundation, Vaduz, Liechtenstein)
- XII-54 One of two 'guard' figures on a carved ivory plaque from fourth/tenth century Egypt. The other figure has an ordinary straight sword, but this soldier holds a large round-headed mace on his shoulder. (Musée du Louvre, Paris)
- XII-55 a-c Amongst the many armed guards and huntsmen on a series of carved wooden panels from the Fāṭimid Caliphal Palace in Cairo are three who appear to carry forms of long-headed maces (see also fig. XII-6). (Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo)



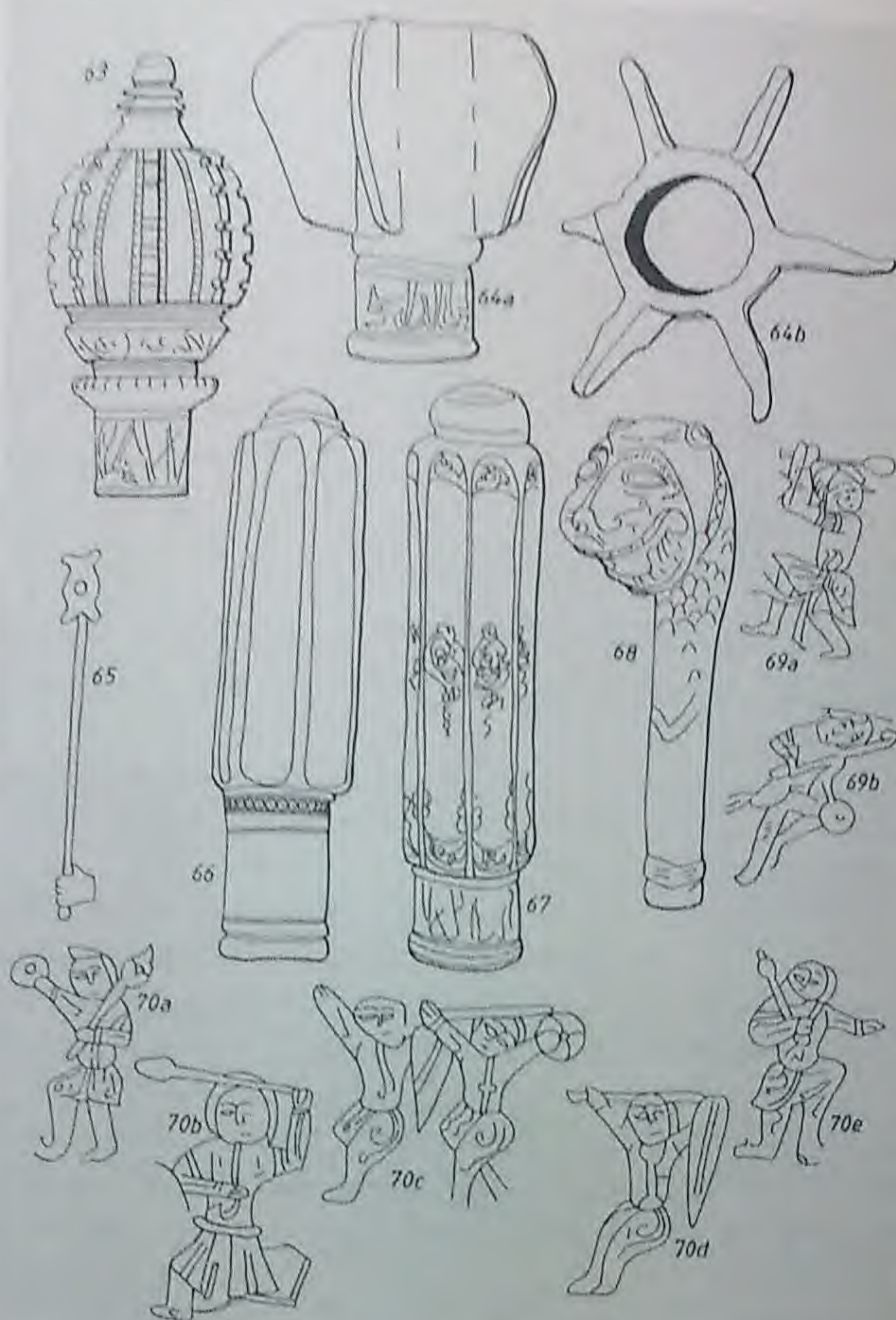






- XII-56 a-c The damaged wall-paintings from the fifth/eleventh-century Ghaznawid Palace at Lashkari Bazar in Afghanistan include a series of apparent guardsmen armed with maces. Though the weapons are damaged, they seem to include long-headed (a-b) and non-symmetrical perhaps zoomorphic forms (c). (Archaeological Museum, Kabul, Afghanistan)
- XII-57 a-b A number of small and very simple pottery statuettes have been found in Transoxanian archaeological sites. As yet none can be dated accurately but their remarkable headgear suggests an Islamic Turkish, perhaps Saljūq fifth/eleventh-century origin. The two illustrated here (a – from Afrasiab-Samarkand; b – from Kafir-Kala) both carry round-headed maces. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)
- XII-58 A particularly finely decorated form of elongated bronze mace-head was excavated at Nishāpūr. It is believed to date from the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century. (Museum of Islamic Art, Tehran)
- XII-59 A cast-iron mace-head, probably from Iran, fifth/eleventh to seventh/thirteenth century. Although it appears to be basically spherical, and would look so if shown in anything but the most detailed illustration, this mace-head is actually winged or flanged. (British Museum, inv. 838-89, London)
- XII-60 A small and detailed, though rather damaged, piece of stucco decoration from the pavilion of the Anatolian Saljūq ruler Kilic Arslan II, in Konya, dates from AH 569/AD 1173-4. The object thrust into this horseman's belt might be a small round-headed mace. (Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, inv. no. 2831, Istanbul)
- XII-61 a-b Side and top views of a hollow iron spiked mace-head. Like some comparable bronze mace-heads from the Balkans, it may originally have been partially filled with lead. The object was found in a layer of ash, in the ruins of the Crusader castle at Vadum Jacob in Palestine which was destroyed in AD 1179. The intense fire would probably have removed any lead interior, along with the wooden haft. The primitive weapon is itself likely to have been of Syrian manufacture and was perhaps used by local levies in Crusader service. (Drawing after K. Raphael, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
- XII-62 The fabric of the so-called 'Cope of St. Thomas à Becket' was made in Almeria, in Islamic al-Andalus, in AD 1116. Its decoration includes a mounted huntsman with a hawk on one wrist (not shown here) and a knobbed or spiked mace in his other hand. (Cathedral Treasury, Fermo, Italy)





- XII-63 A small ceremonial or symbolic mace-head with an inscription dedicated to Abū' Faṭḥ Mūḥammad Ibn Sultān, from north-eastern Iran or Transoxania, early seventh/thirteenth century. (Private collection)
- XII-64 a-b Side and top views of a bronze winged mace from Palestine or Lebanon, seventh/thirteenth century Saljūq. (Private collection)
- XII-65 The presumed mace held by the figure of an Artuqid Turkish ruler on an enamelled bronze dish, south-eastern Anatolia, early sixth/twelfth century. (Ferdinand Museum, Innsbruck)
- XII-66 A miniature or symbolic bronze mace-head of the elongated type, probably from Iran or Iraq, sixth/twelfth or seventh/thirteenth century (the details of the decoration are not shown here). (Museum of Islamic Art, inv. 15207, Cairo)
- XII-67 A bronze mace-head of the elongated type from north-eastern Iran, sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century. (Rifa'at Shaykh al-'Ard Collection, Geneva)
- XII-68 A bronze or brass mace-head of non-symmetrical zoomorphic form, probably from Iran, sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century. (County Museum of Art, inv. M.73.5.309, Los Angeles)
- XII-69 a-b Figures of infantry soldiers armed with maces, both round-headed and non-symmetrical, in the silver inlaid decoration on the bronze 'Blacas Ewer' made by Shuja Ibn Mana in AD 1232, probably in northern Iraq. (British Museum, London)
- XII-70 a-e Figures of infantry and cavalry armed with maces, swords and both small round and kite-shaped shields in the silver inlaid decoration on the bronze 'Fano Cup'. This was made around AD 1250, probably in Syria. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

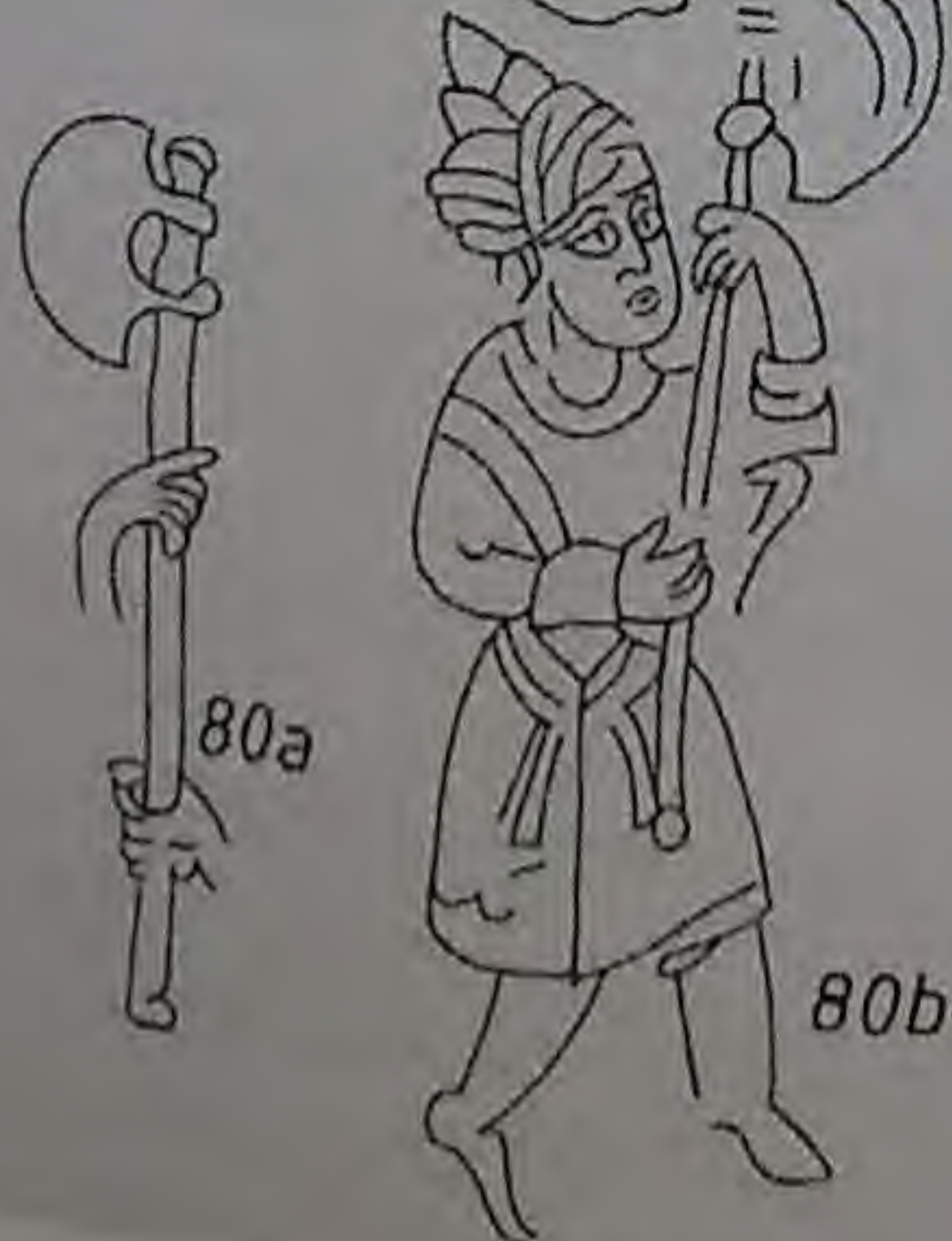
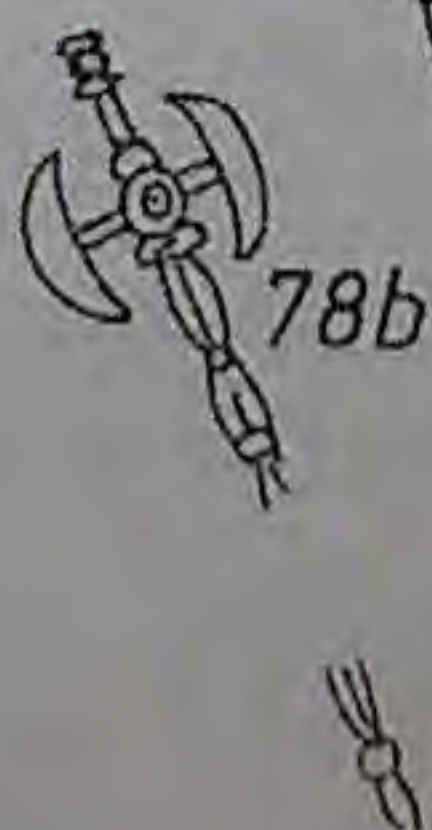
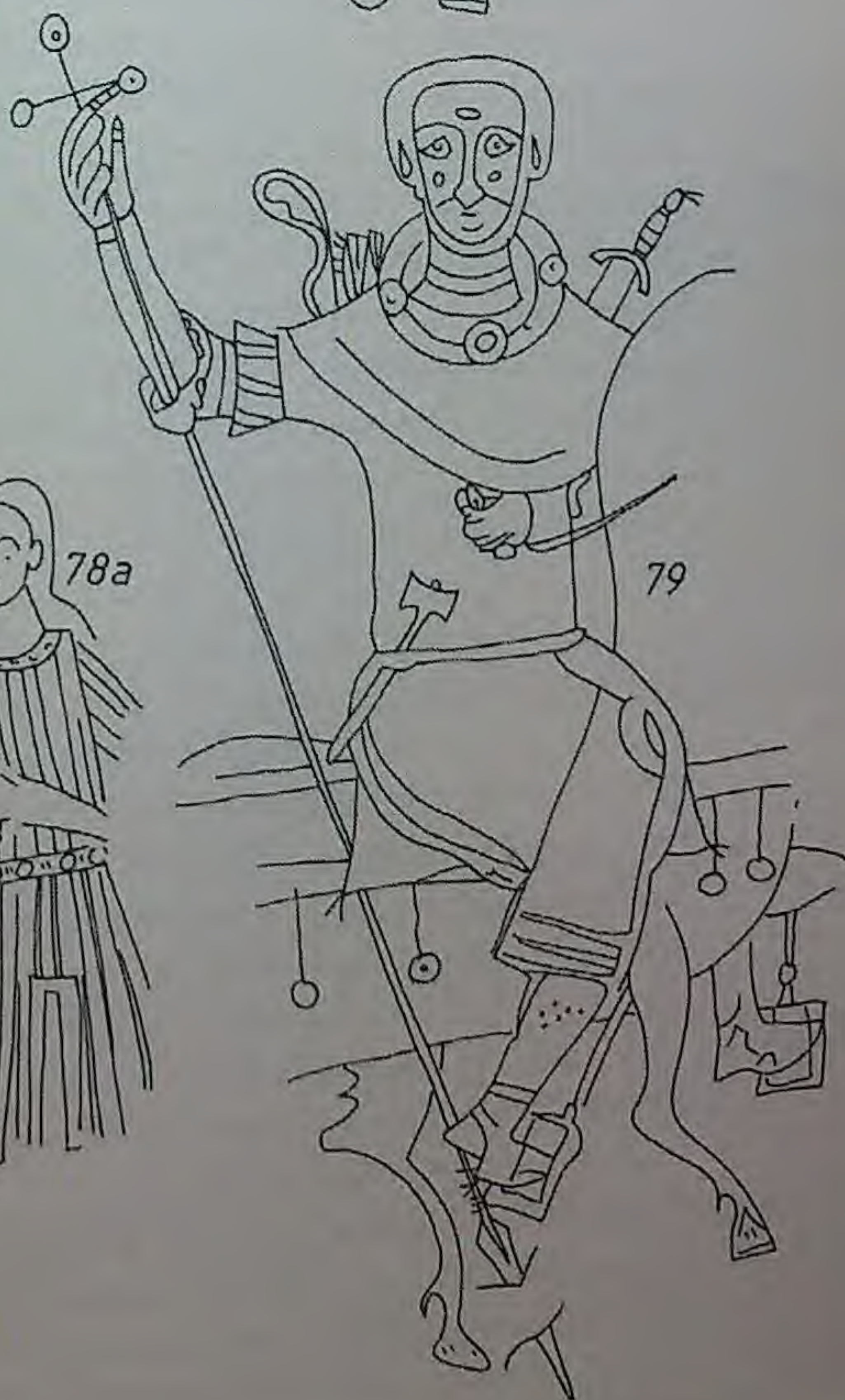


- XII-71 a-b Guardsmen armed with maces on a silver inlaid bronze ewer made by Yūnus al-Mawsili, probably in northern Iraq, in AH 644/AD 1246-7. (Walters Art Gallery, no. 54.456, Baltimore, USA)
- XII-72 Dirham coin from the reign of Kay Kāwūs II, the Saljūq Turkish ruler of Anatolia, showing the ruler holding a flanged or winged mace. It was minted in AH 640/AD 1242-3. (British Museum, London)
- XII-73 A cast bronze mace from Iran, Saljūq, seventh/thirteenth century. The long slender handle was probably bound with leather or might have been encased in wood. (Furusiyya Art Foundation, Vaduz, Liechtenstein)
- XII-74 Amongst the very simple and very damaged wall-paintings uncovered by archaeologists at the pre-Islamic Kinda Arab capital of Qaryat al-Faw in Arabia was this little figure of a warrior hunting camels. He carries a rectangular shield and what might be a large war-axe. The paintings date from the first to fifth centuries AD. (King Saud University Museum, inv. no. F2-252, Riyadh)
- XII-75 An apparently armoured foot soldier accompanying a cavalryman (not shown here) on a pre-Islamic relief carving from the area around Zafār in Yemen. He carries a short-hafted war-axe and a small round shield. (*in situ* incorporated into a modern building in the village of Bayt al-'Anābī, Yemen)
- XII-76 One of several warrior figures around the base of a carved ivory chess piece in the so-called 'Chess set of Charlemagne'. The chess piece is in the form of a ruler on an elephant, probably a 'king'. The figures are in an essentially Indian style though the chess piece was carved in an Islamic-Arab ruled region, perhaps the Sind province of Pakistan. This is, however, the only horseman to be armed with an axe. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 311, Paris)
- XII-77 Figure with a small round shield and an axe which appears to incorporate a thrusting spike, on a Gabri-ware ceramic bottle, Iran, third/ninth or fourth/tenth century. (Musée du Louvre, Paris)
- XII-78 a-b Details from the early fourth/tenth century Byzantine wall-paintings in the Tokali Kilise, showing single and double-headed axes carried by soldiers at 'The Betrayal'. Though made within the easternmost provinces of the Byzantine Empire, these paintings are considered to have been strongly influenced by neighbouring Islamic art, and that this was also the case with the arms and armour which they illustrate. (*in situ* Chapel 7, the 'Old Church', Tokali Kilise, Göreme, Turkey)
- XII-79 If the provincial art of the eastern frontier regions of the Byzantine Empire differed from that of the capital, Constantinople, the Christian Coptic art of Egypt had developed an entirely new style by the fourth/tenth century, when this manuscript illustration was painted. It is in a *Synaxary* from Tōtūn in the Fayūm, and represents a mounted warrior saint whose costume and armoury reflects that of Islamic troops. His equipment includes a torque or necklace given as a mark of rank or as a reward, a bow and arrows on his back behind his right shoulder, a sword on his back behind his left shoulder, and what could be a small mace or very small war-axe thrust into his belt. (Pierpont Morgan Library, inv. M. 613, f. 1v, New York)





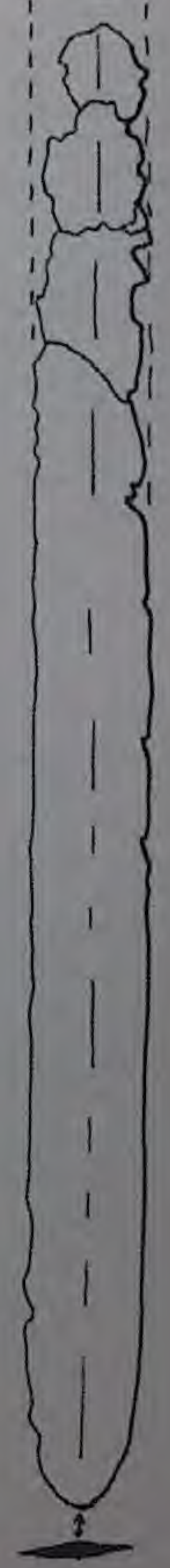
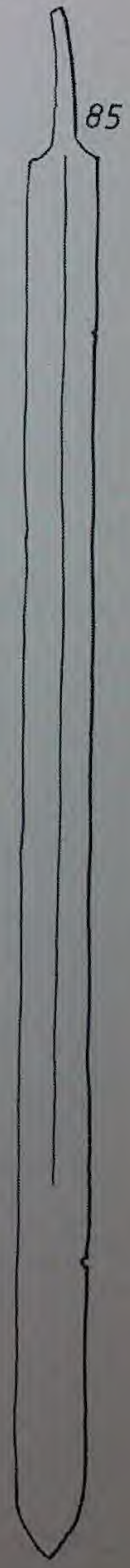
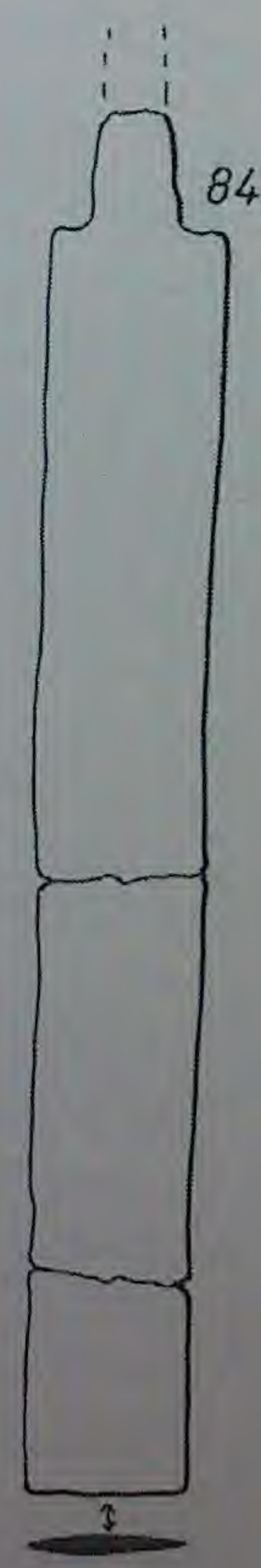
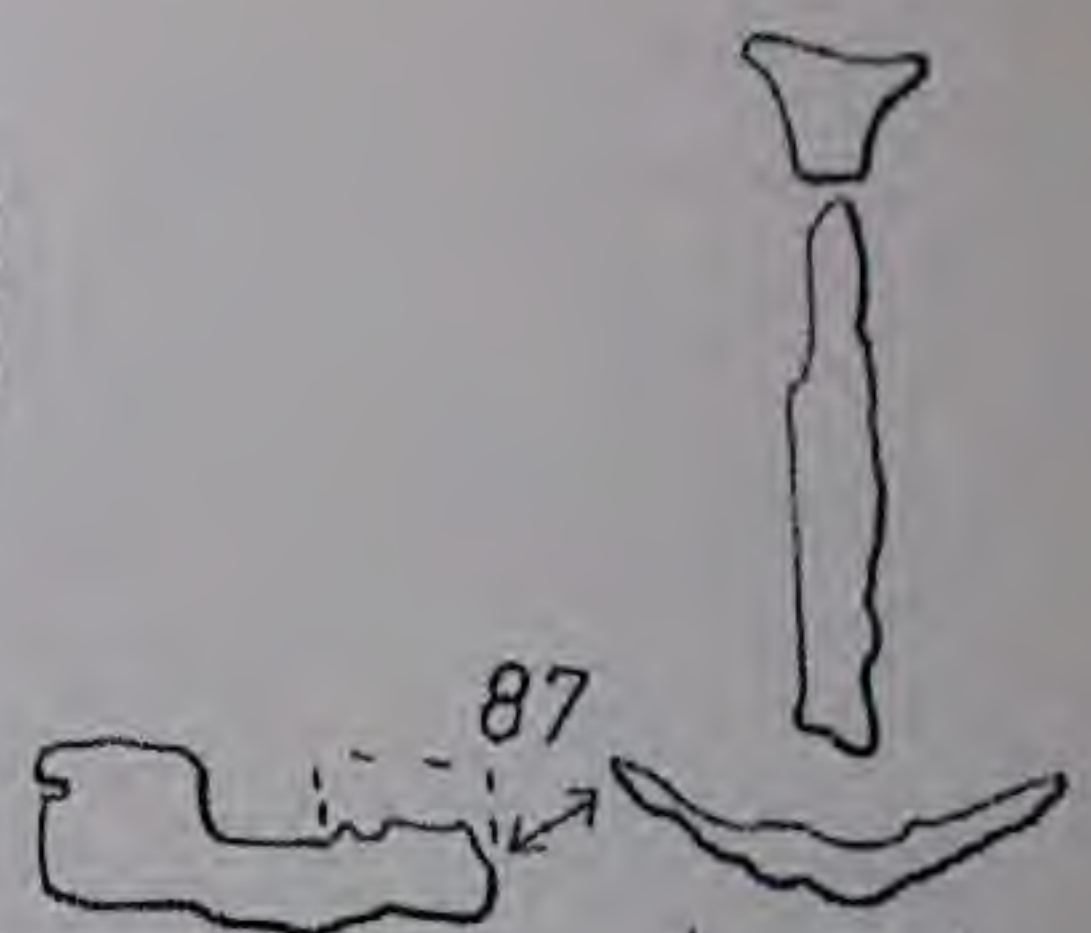
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- XII-80 a-c Figures on the painted wooden ceiling panels in Palermo, c. AD 1140. There is considerable debate about whether the obvious Islamic artistic influence, style and content of these paintings survived from the previous period of Islamic rule in Sicily, or stemmed from North Africa, or came directly from Fāṭimid Egypt. Two of the figures shown here (a and b) might actually be carrying fans rather than war-axes, but the third figure (c) clearly carries an axe as well as a sword. (*in situ* Capella Palatina, Palermo, Italy)
- XII-81 A figure armed with an axe, a large round shield and perhaps a sword, inlaid on a bronze ewer made by Ibrāhīm Ibn Mawāliyā, northern Iraq, early seventh/thirteenth century. (Musée du Louvre, inv. 3435, Paris)
- XII-82 Silver inlaid iron war-axe from Bulgar on the river Volga, late sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century. Although it was found in the capital of the Turkish-Islamic Volga Bulgar Khānate, this weapon is unlikely to have been made there. It was probably imported from Iran or elsewhere in the Islamic heartlands of the Middle East. (After S.A. Pletnyeva, *Stepi Eurasi v Ehpoxu Spednevekoviya* [Moscow, 1981])
- XII-83 The two sides and a sectional view of the remains of a long slender sword excavated at Pendzhikent in Transoxania. It dates from immediately before the Islamic conquest in the early second/eighth century. The existing blade is a little over three centimetres across. (after V.I. Raspopova, *Metallicheskiye Izdeliya Rannesrednevekovogo Sogda* [Leningrad, 1980])
- XII-84 The surviving fragments of a straight, double-edged non-tapering sword from Nishāpūr, dating from the third/ninth to fourth/eighth century. This blade is approximately 6cm across and is within the Middle Eastern Arab rather than Iranian or Central Asian tradition. (Archaeological Museum, Tehran)
- XII-85 A sword which is said to have belonged to the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Musta'īn (AH 248–252/AD 862–866). The blade is 96cm long plus a tang of 9cm, and somewhat over 4.5cm wide. (Topkapi Museum, inv. no. 1/109, Istanbul)
- XII-86 This double-edged sword is said to have belonged to the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, but is almost certainly of 'Abbāsid origin. The blade measures 76cm, plus a tang of 10cm. (Topkapi Museum, inv. no. 1/99, Istanbul)
- XII-87 Fragments of a sword excavated in Oman and probably of immediately pre-Islamic Sassanian origin. The existing length of the weapon is around 82cm, though the upper part of the blade is missing. (After a drawing sent to D. Nicolle by the archaeologist, Carl Phillips)
- XII-88 A coin bearing the name and presumed image of Yazīd Ibn al-Muhallab, minted in Gurgān, northern Iran, in AH 84/AD 703–4. The figure appears to be armoured and has a double-edged spear plus a sword which seems to hang from a belt rather than a baldric. (Private collection)

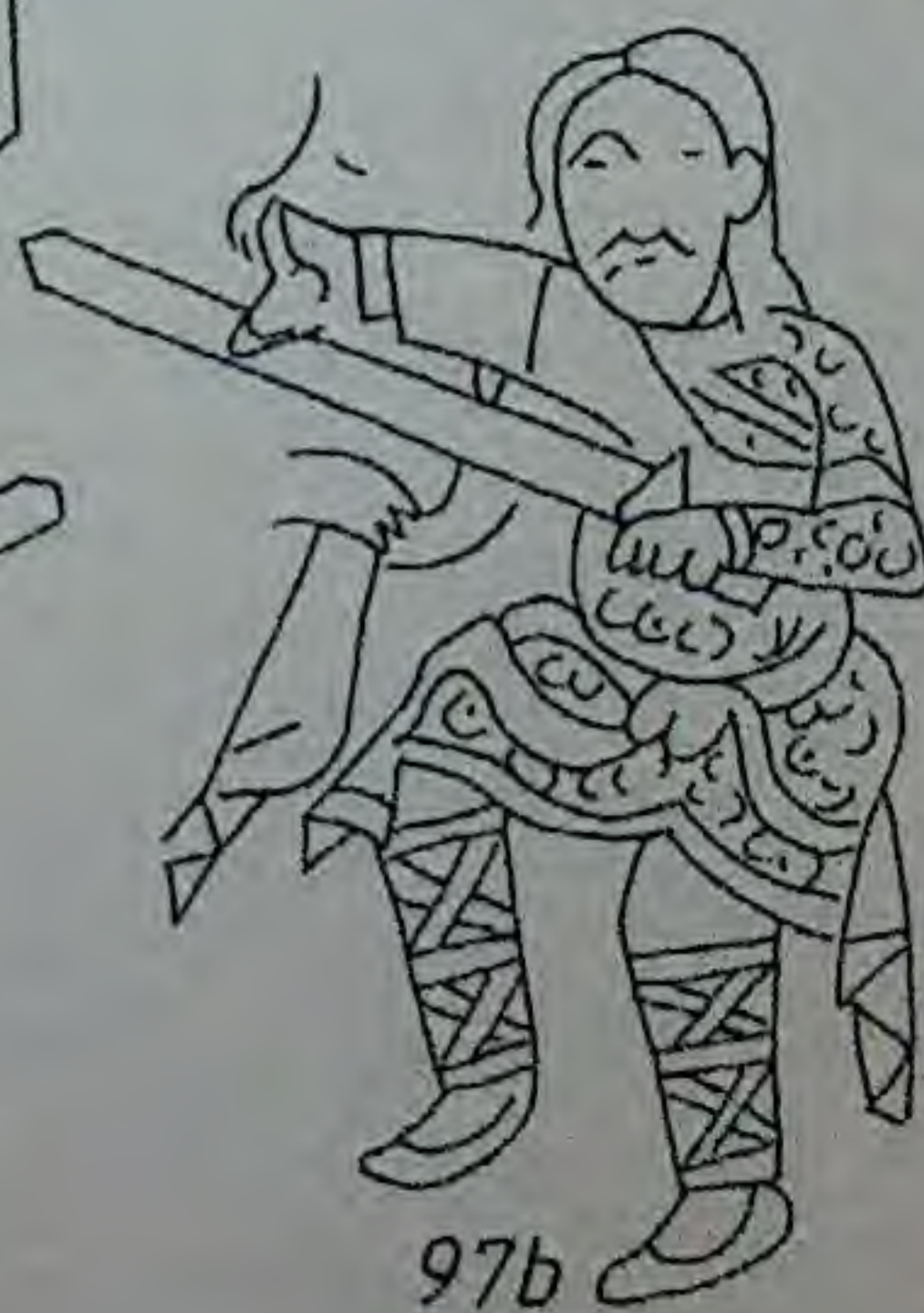
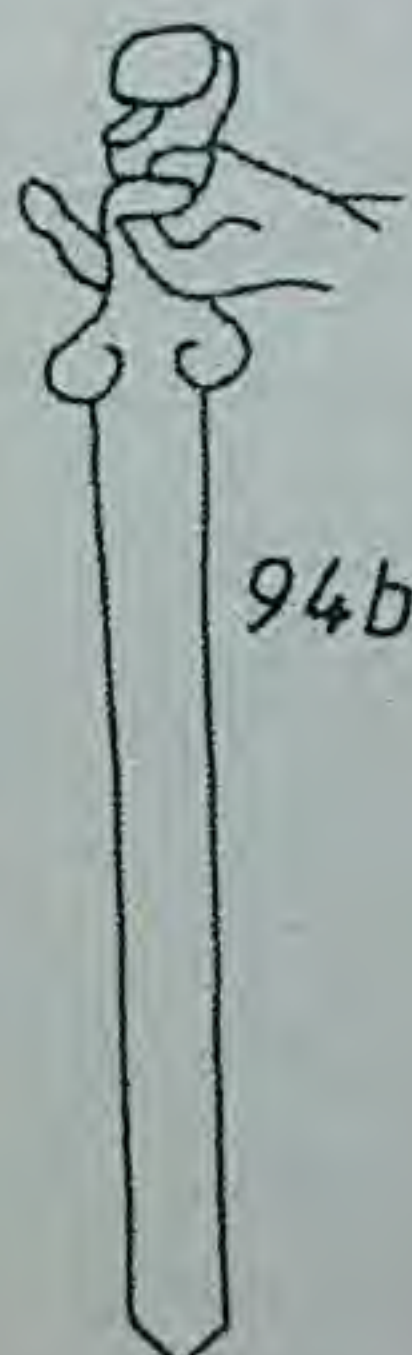
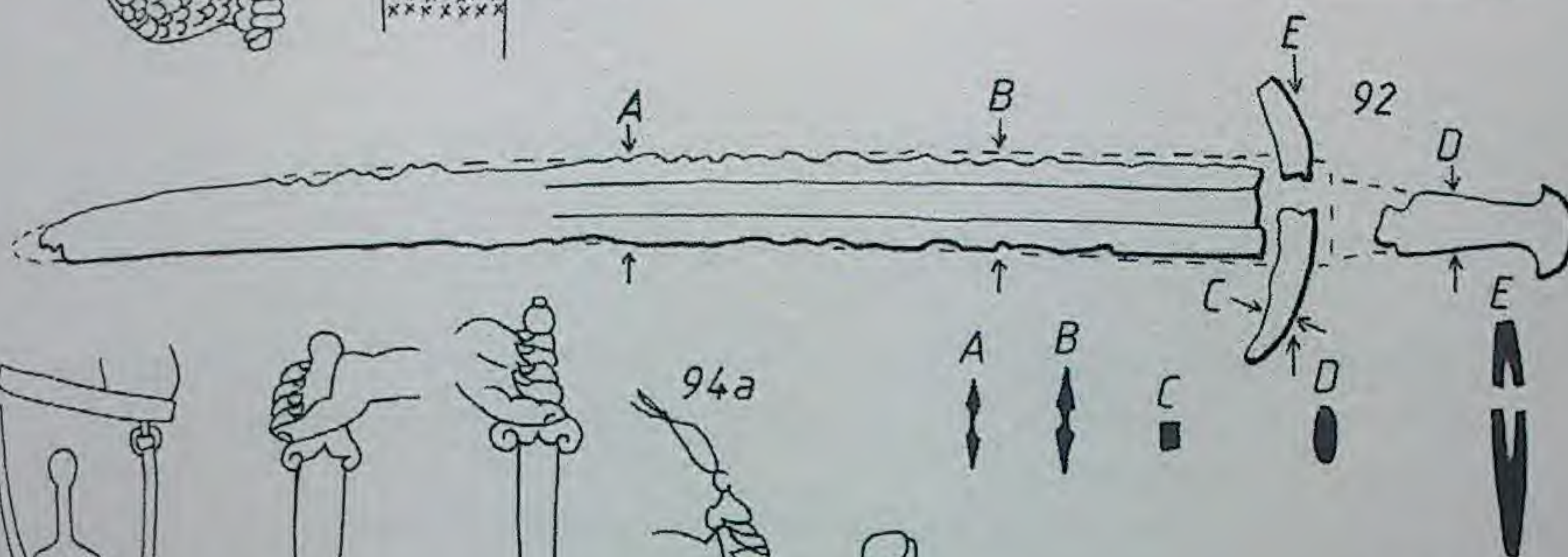
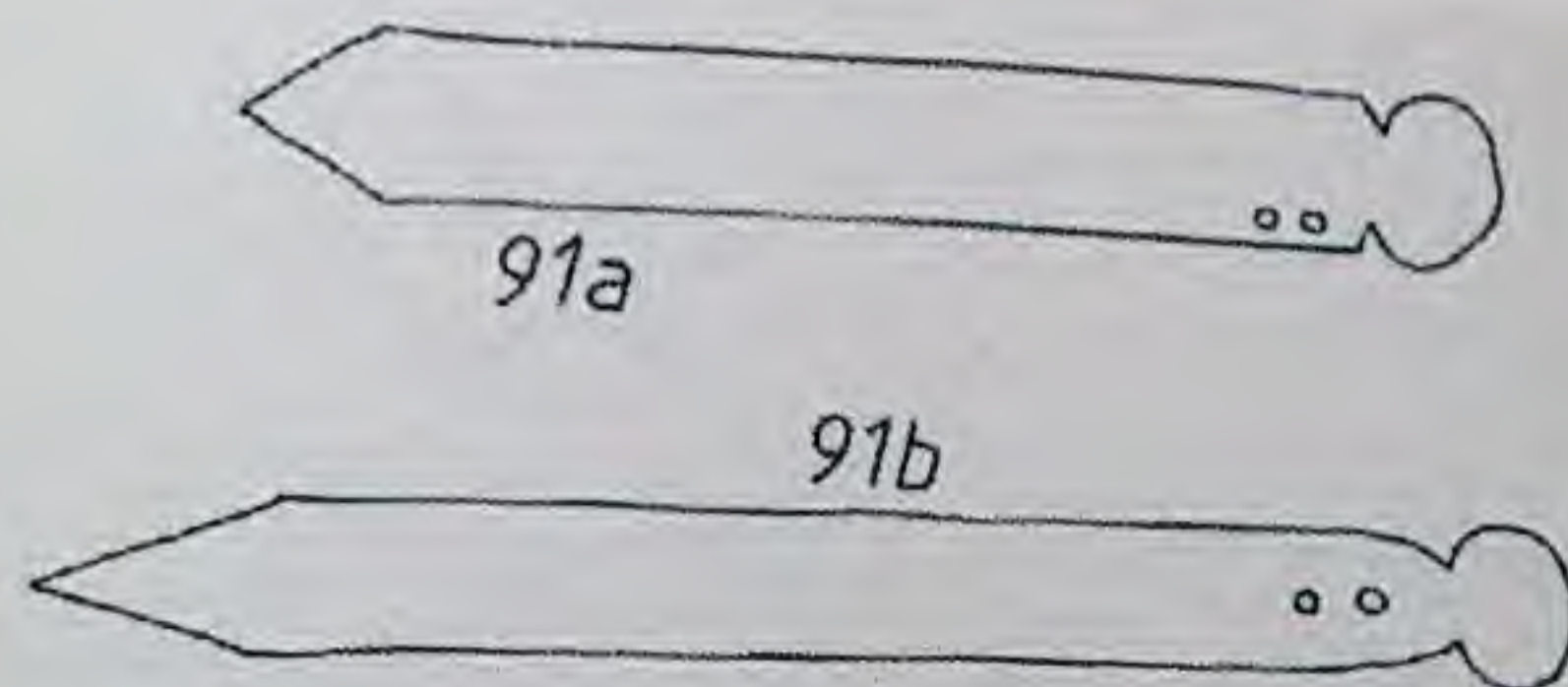
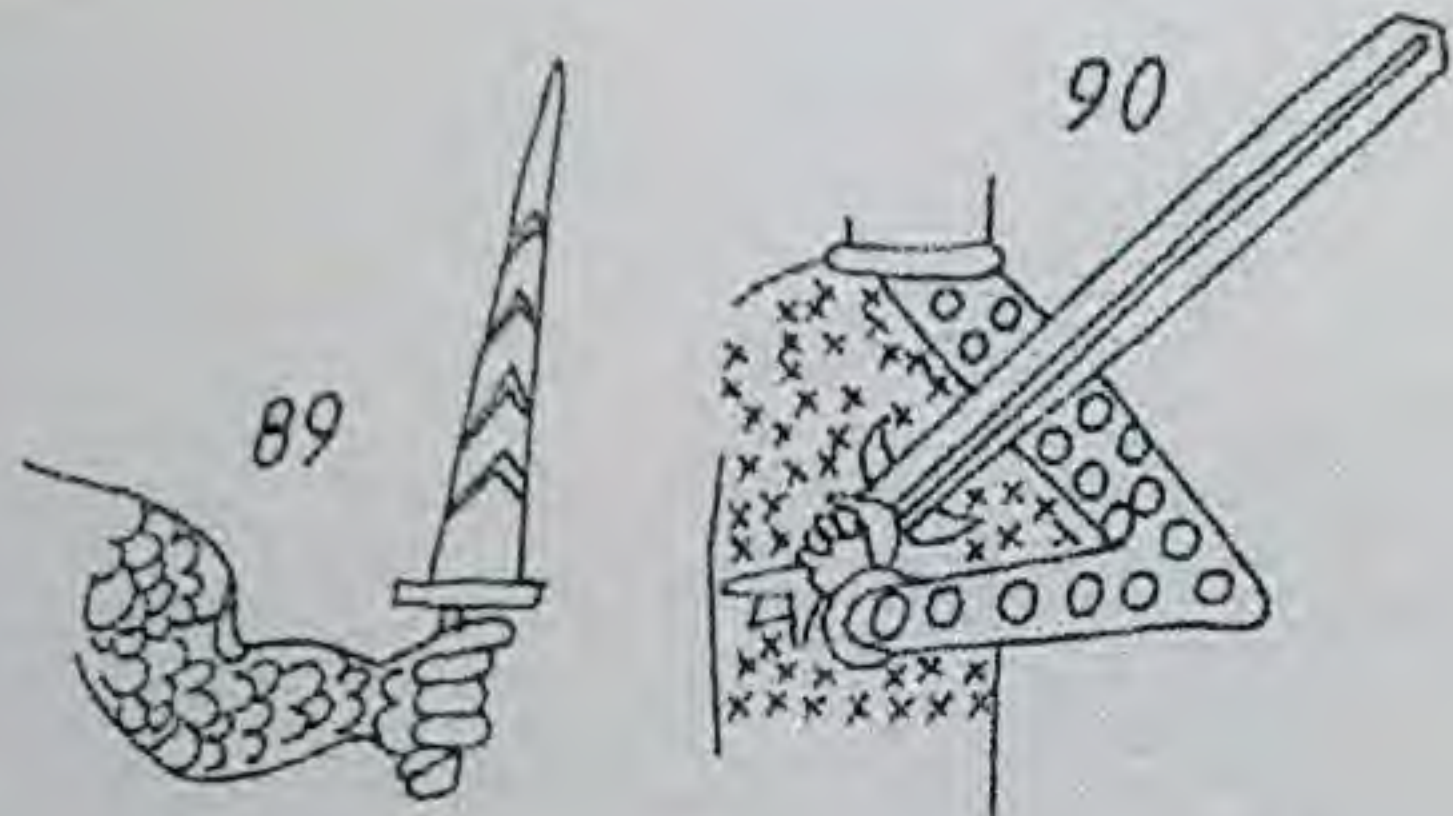






- XII-89 A detail from a painted ceramic plate from Nishāpūr, showing a straight sword carried by a fully armoured cavalryman, fourth/tenth century. (Museum of Islamic Art, Tehran)
- XII-90 A detail from a painted ceramic plate from Nishāpūr, showing a non-tapering straight sword or perhaps 'iron staff' form of mace carried by a fully armoured cavalryman, fourth/tenth century. (Museum of Islamic Art, Tehran)
- XII-91 a-b Stylized drawings of a Yemeni *sāmsām* type of sword-blade in a later copy of al-Kindī's book on swords, *Al-Suyūf wa ajnāsuha*: a – after Zaki; b – after Hammer-Purgstall. Both versions clearly indicate the way in which the end of the tang expands into a disc-shape to go inside the pommel (see also figs. XII-41 and XII-42). (Said to be in Leiden University Library, Netherlands)
- XII-92 A sword found in the wreck of an Islamic ship off the southern coast of France near Agay, probably fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh century. The blade has a fuller-groove along more than half of its length, plus quillons which look very much like those of European swords from a century or so later, but the way in which the tang is shaped to fit exactly the outline of the lost grip and pommel is a feature which was characteristic of western Islamic and Andalusian rather than European swords (see also figs. XII-41 and XII-42). (Museum of Underwater Archaeology, St. Raphael, France)
- XII-93 a-c Swords carried by Perseus and another zodiac figure in the earliest surviving illustrated copy of *The Book of Fixed Stars* by 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sūfī, made in Iraq or Egypt in AD 1009. (Bodleian Library, Ms. March 144, ff. 110, 111 and 325, Oxford)
- XII-94 a-b Swords carried by Perseus slightly later copies of *The Book of Fixed Stars* by 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sūfī: a – made in Iraq or Egypt in AH 525/AD 1130–1 (Topkapi Library, Ms. Ahmad III, 3493, f. 30r, Istanbul); b – made in western Iran or south-eastern Anatolia in AH 529/AD 1134–5 (Topkapi Library, Ms. Fatih 3422, f. 67v, Istanbul)
- XII-95 A short sword or larger dagger from an Islamic archaeological site at Beshtam-Kala in Transoxania, sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century. The entire weapon is approximately 80cm long, and again incorporates a flared or expanded tang to fit the shape of the hilt. (After photocopied drawings supplied by B.I. Marshak to D. Nicolle; present whereabouts unknown)
- XII-96 Coin of the Artuqid dynasty of Diyarbakir in what is now south-eastern Turkey, late sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century. The seated figure of the armoured ruler holds a broad, non-tapering straight sword plus the head of a defeated foe. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Medailles, Paris)
- XII-97 a-b Relief carvings from the now collapsed gate of 'Amādiya in northern Iraq. It was built between AD 1233 and 1259. The two warrior figures wear mail hauberks and carry straight non-tapering swords. (From photographs of the lost carvings in the Iraqi Department of Antiquities, Baghdad)
- XII-98 An 'Abbāsid double-edged sword with a blade 76cm long, plus 10cm. for the tang inside the hilt. (Topkapi Museum, inv. no. 1/101, Istanbul)





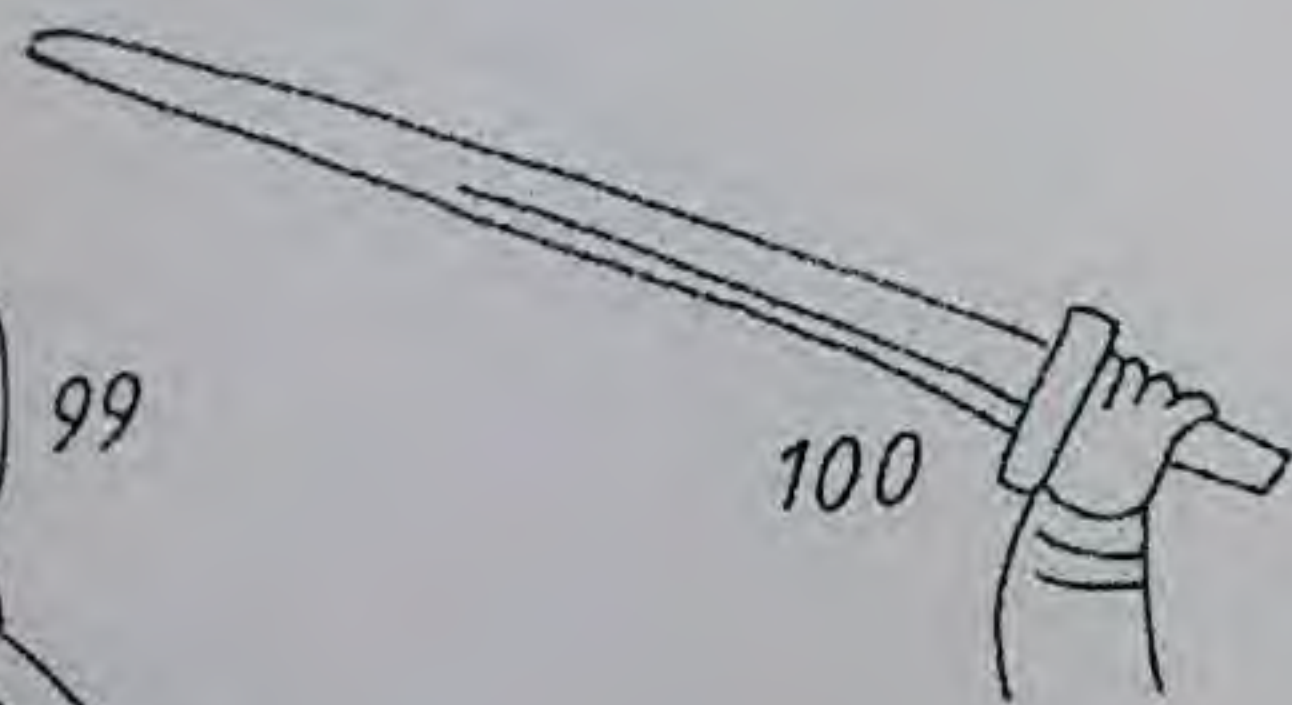


- XII-99 Pre-Islamic southern Arabian stone relief carving of a figure with what appears to be a slightly curved large dagger or sword at his belt. (Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 31.300.1647, Sana'a, Yemen)
- XII-100 A very long and almost certainly single-edged tapering sword in the hand of 'The Angel of Death' in the first/seventh-century *Ashburnham Pentateuch*. This Christian manuscript is believed to have been made in North Africa, and the sword is perhaps the earliest representation of a pallas or proto-sabre in Romano-Byzantine art. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. Acq. Lat. 2334, f. 65b, Paris)
- XII-101 a-d Single-edged swords with the remains of Arabic inscriptions on their blades between the surviving scabbard mounts. They come from pagan Kirghiz Turkish burials near the upper Yenesi river in what is now the Tuva region of the Russian Federation, on the frontier with Mongolia. The weapons date from the third/ninth or fourth/tenth century and were almost certainly exported from the Islamic world, probably from Transoxania. (After A.D. Grach *et al.*, *Eniseiskie Kuirguizui v Tsentre Tuvui* [Moscow, 1998])
- XII-102 Another single-edged sword from a pagan Kirghiz Turkish burial near the upper Yenesi river. It was ceremonially 'killed' by heating and bending before being placed in the grave. Fourth/tenth to sixth/twelfth century. (After A.D. Grach *et al.*, *Eniseiskie Kuirguizui v Tsentre Tuvui* [Moscow, 1998])
- XII-103 A slightly curved sabre found in Nishāpūr in eastern Iran. Two decorated ring holders were also found, probably from the lost hilt of this weapon. The archaeological context was third/ninth to fourth/tenth century (see also fig. XII-26). (Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 40.170.168, New York)
- XII-104 The blade of a sabre found at Nezin in the Ukraine, which dates from between AD 1150 and 1240 (see also fig. XII-30 for the remains of an Arabic inscription on this blade). (State Historical Museum, Chernihiv, Ukraine)
- XII-105 Mamlūk sabre dated AH 889/AD 1484. (Topkapi Museum, inv. no. 1/385, Istanbul)
- XII-106 Decoration in the form of a horse-archer, on a bronze jar, Iran or Transoxania, believed to be pre-Islamic but possibly from the very early Islamic period, first/seventh century. Note that the scabbard of the broad straight sword appears to hang from a baldric rather than a sword-belt. (Private collection)
- XII-107 Gold coin bearing the name and the image of the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, and dated AH 75/AD 694-5. Before the practice of putting a human image on early Islamic coins was abandoned near the end of the seventh century AD, the ruling Caliph was often portrayed with a sword which was almost invariably hung from a baldric. (Private collection)
- XII-108 Small carved ivory plaque portraying an Arab warrior, Byzantine, fourth/tenth to sixth/twelfth century. The man clearly has a straight non-tapering sword and a scabbard hung from a baldric, apparently of a rope-like material, while in his left hand he carries a small round shield. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

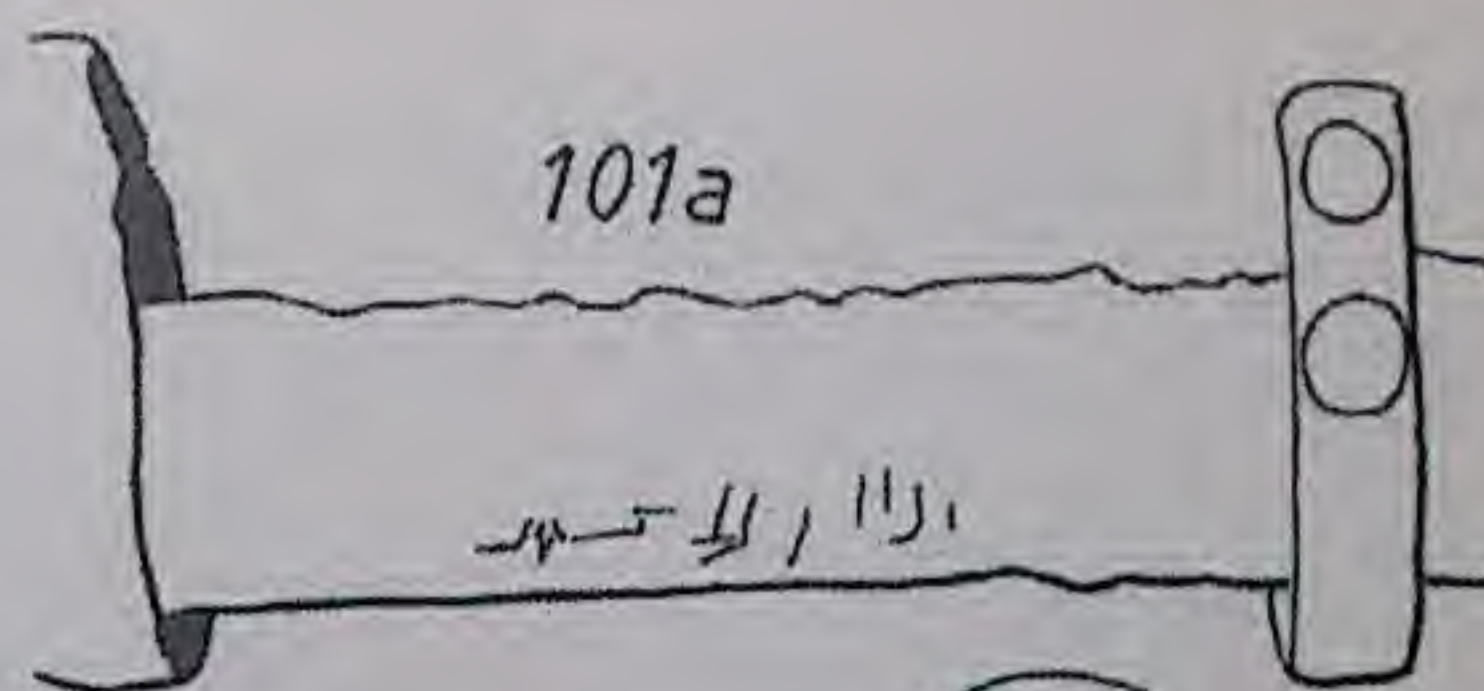




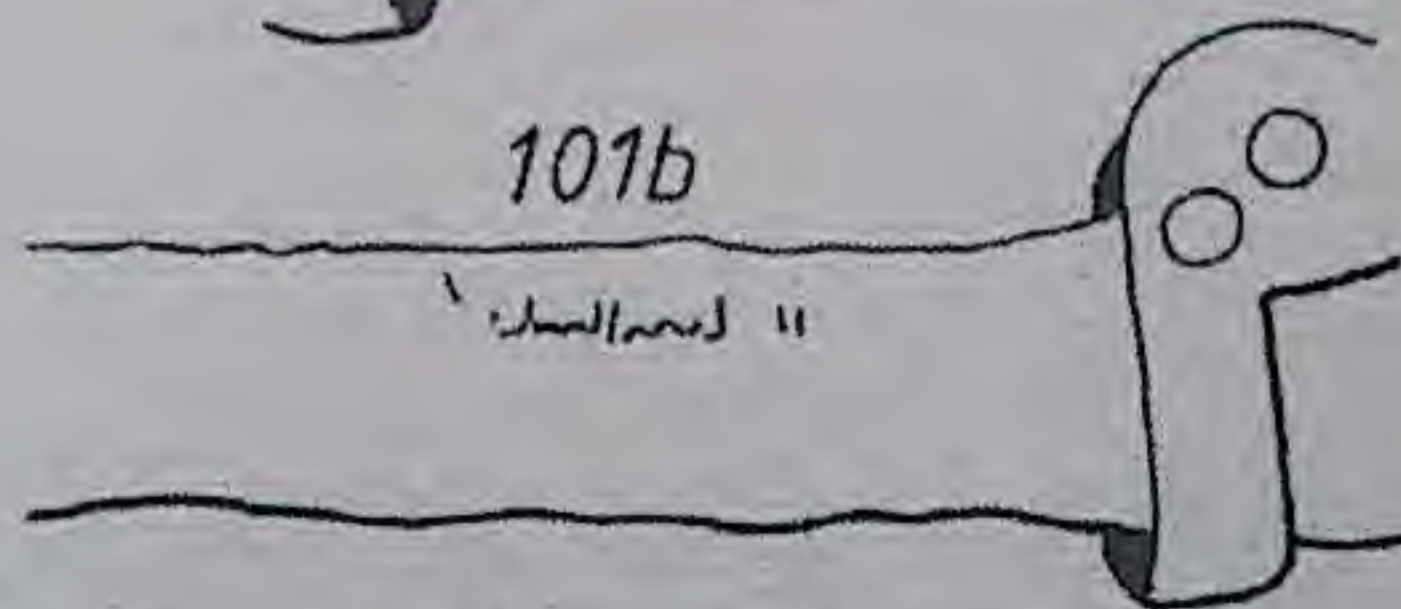
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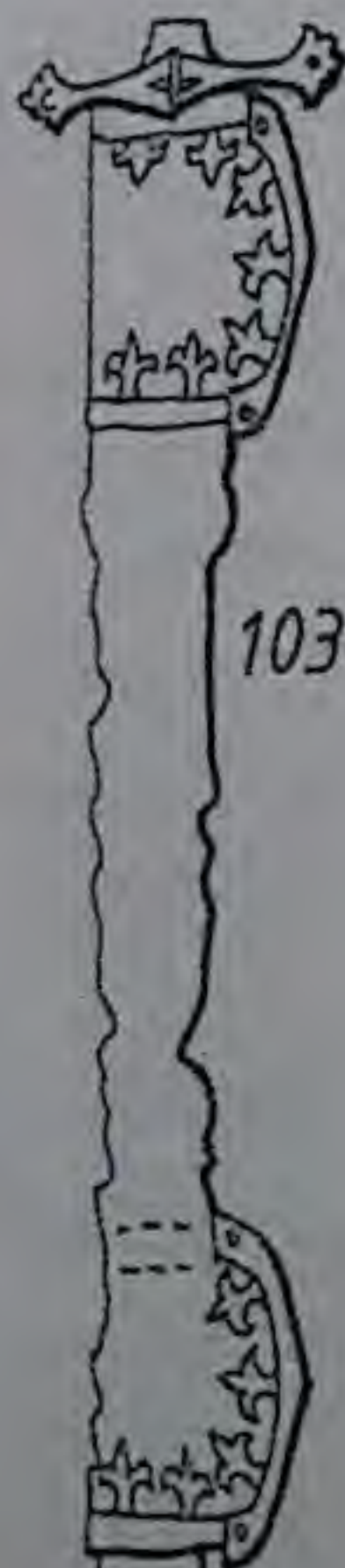
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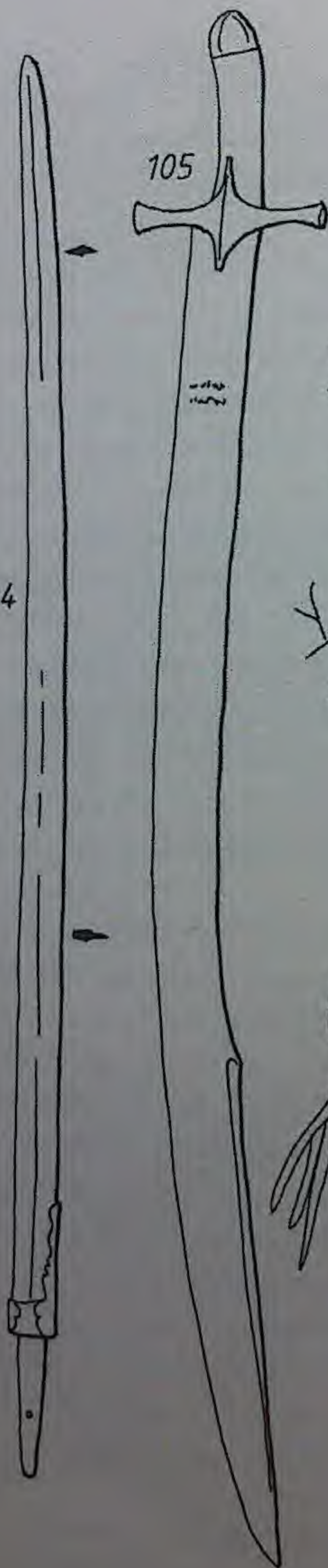
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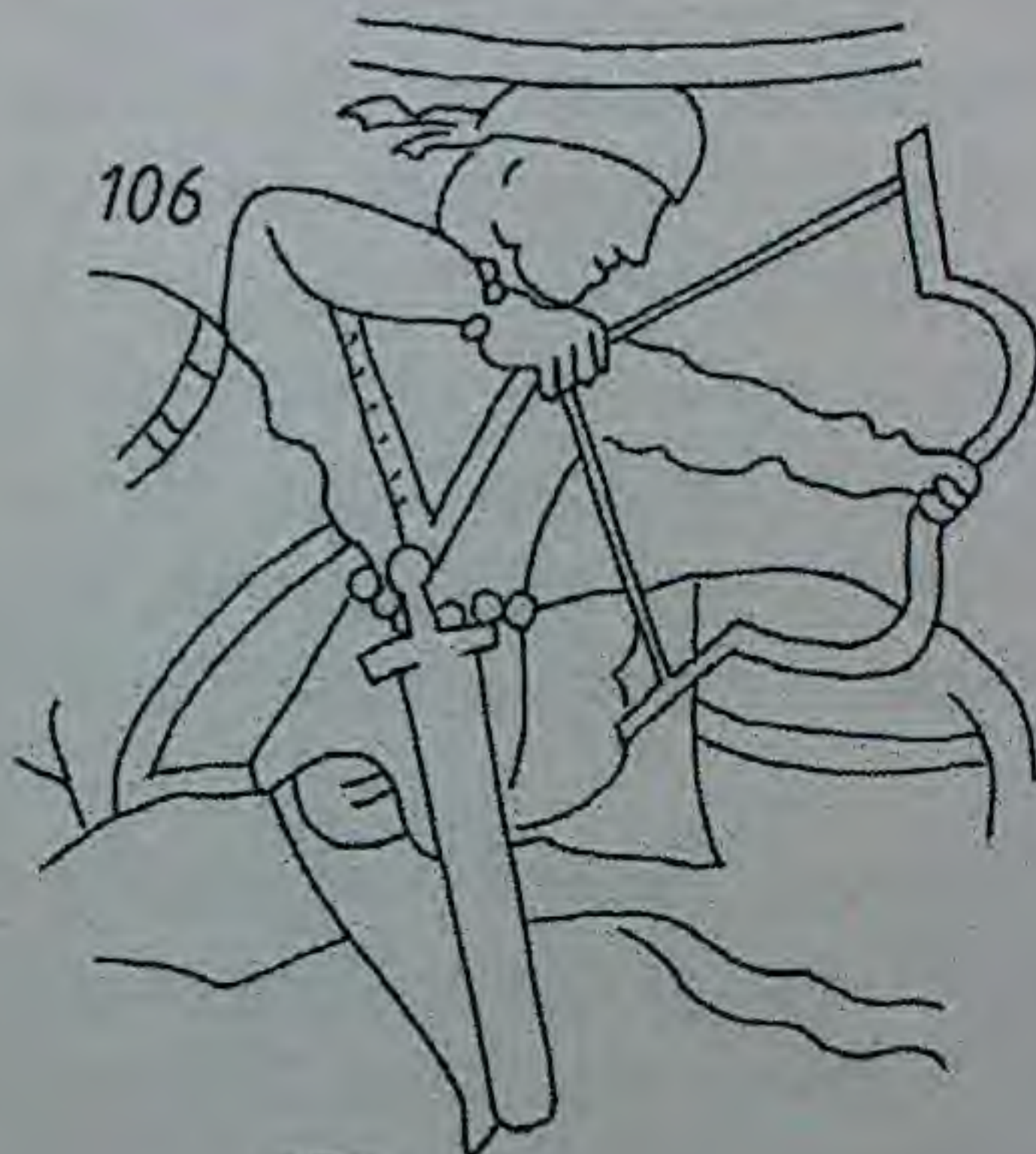


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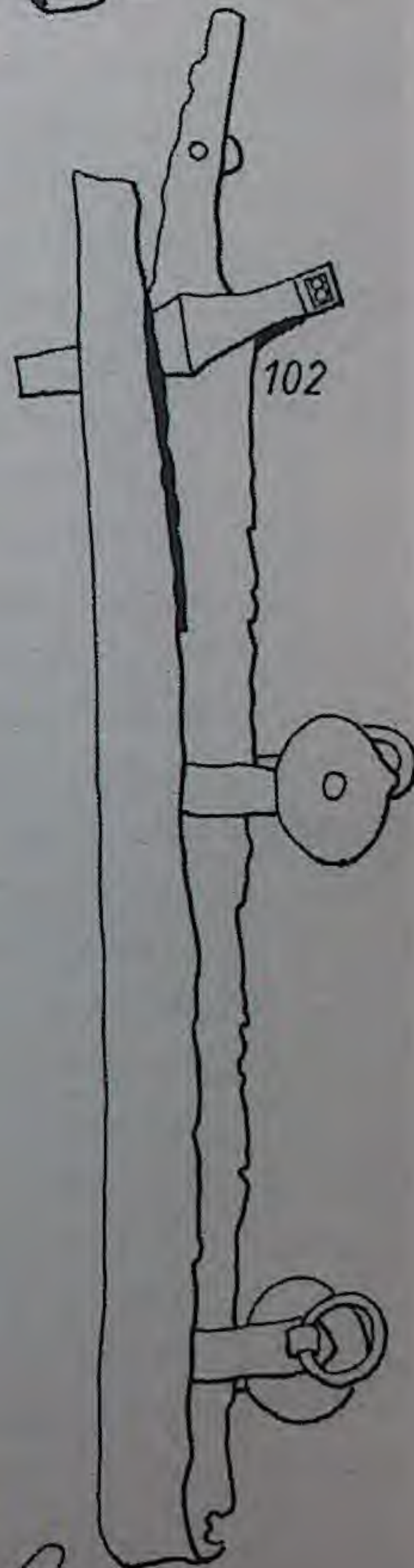
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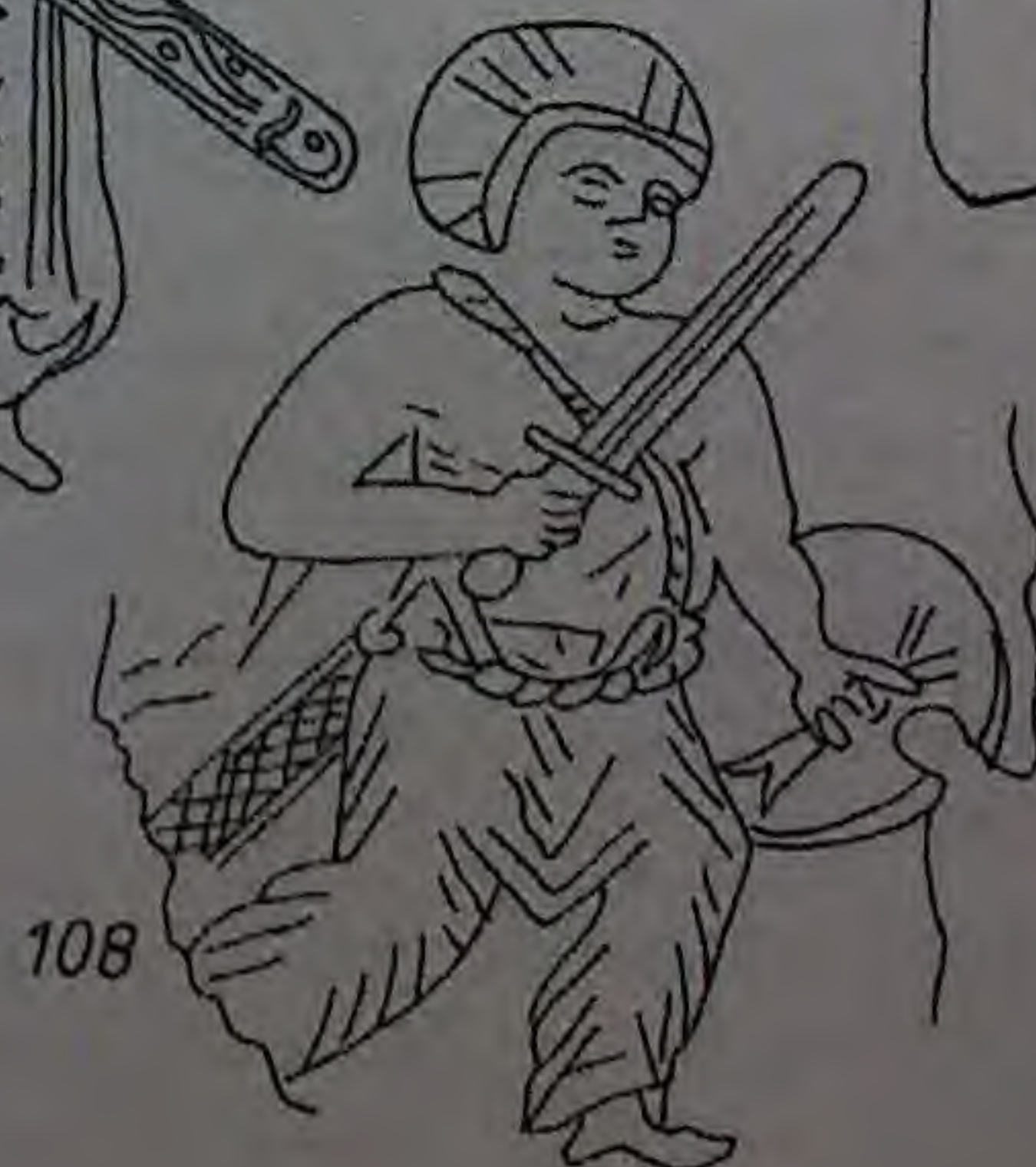
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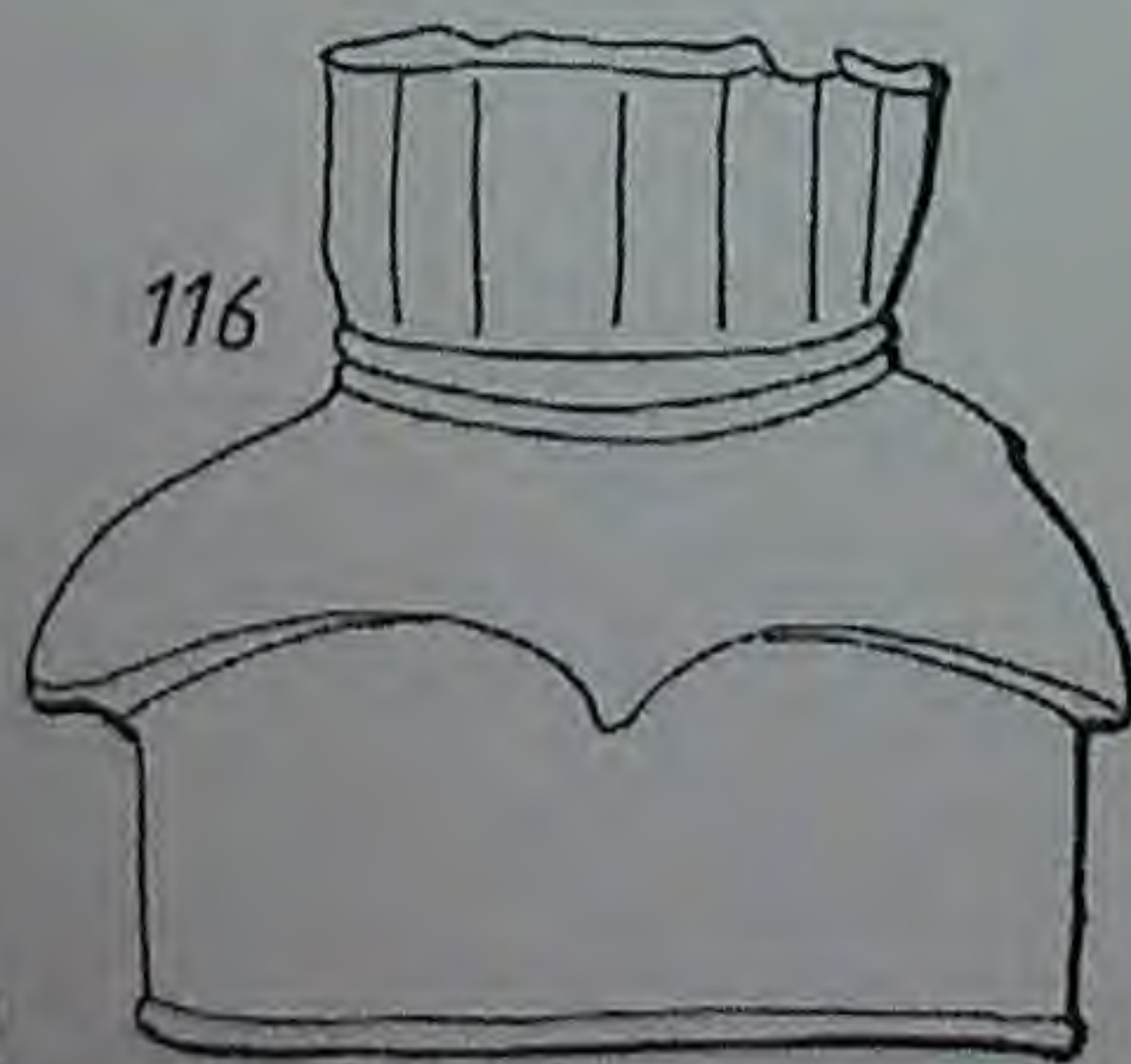
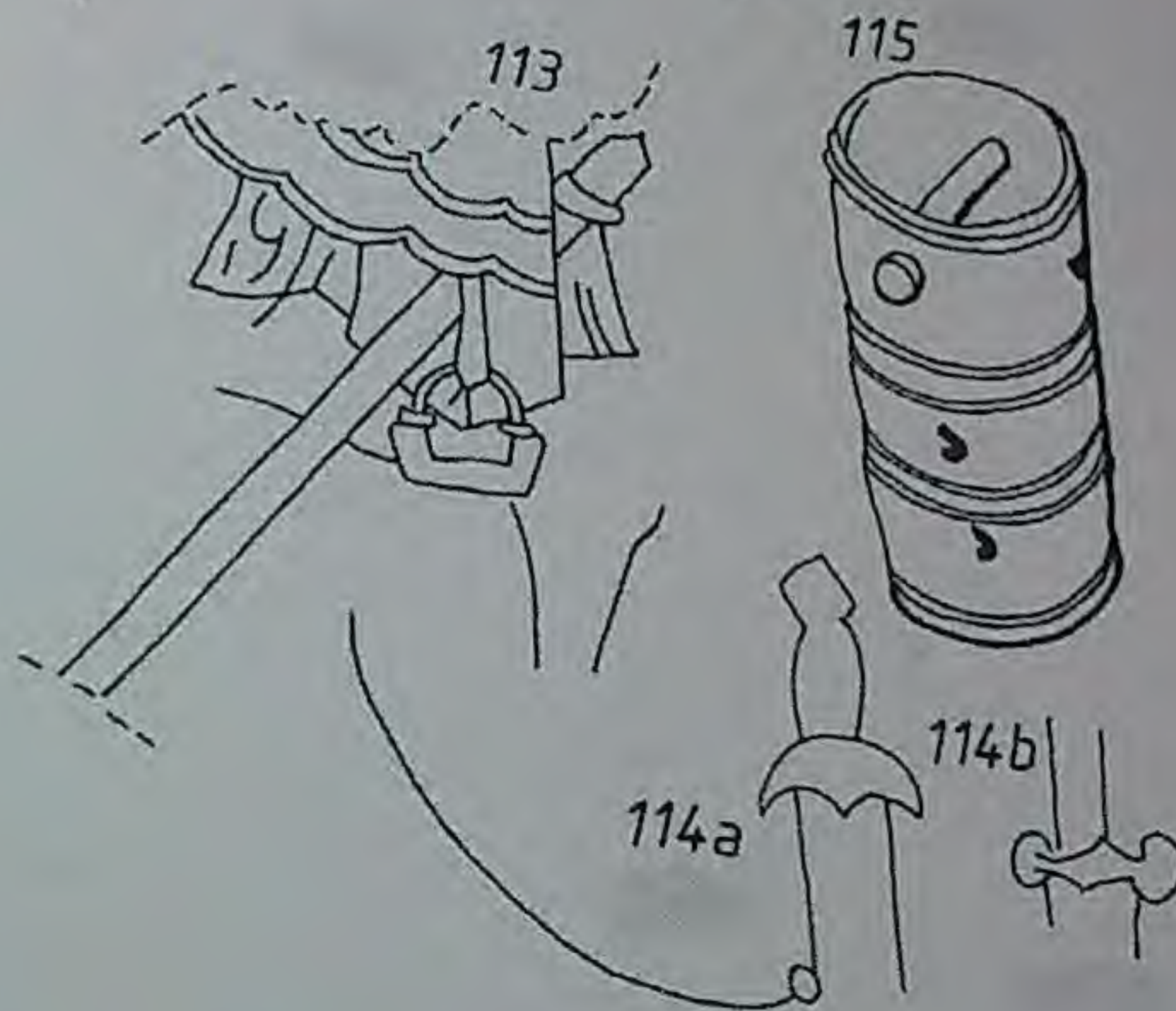
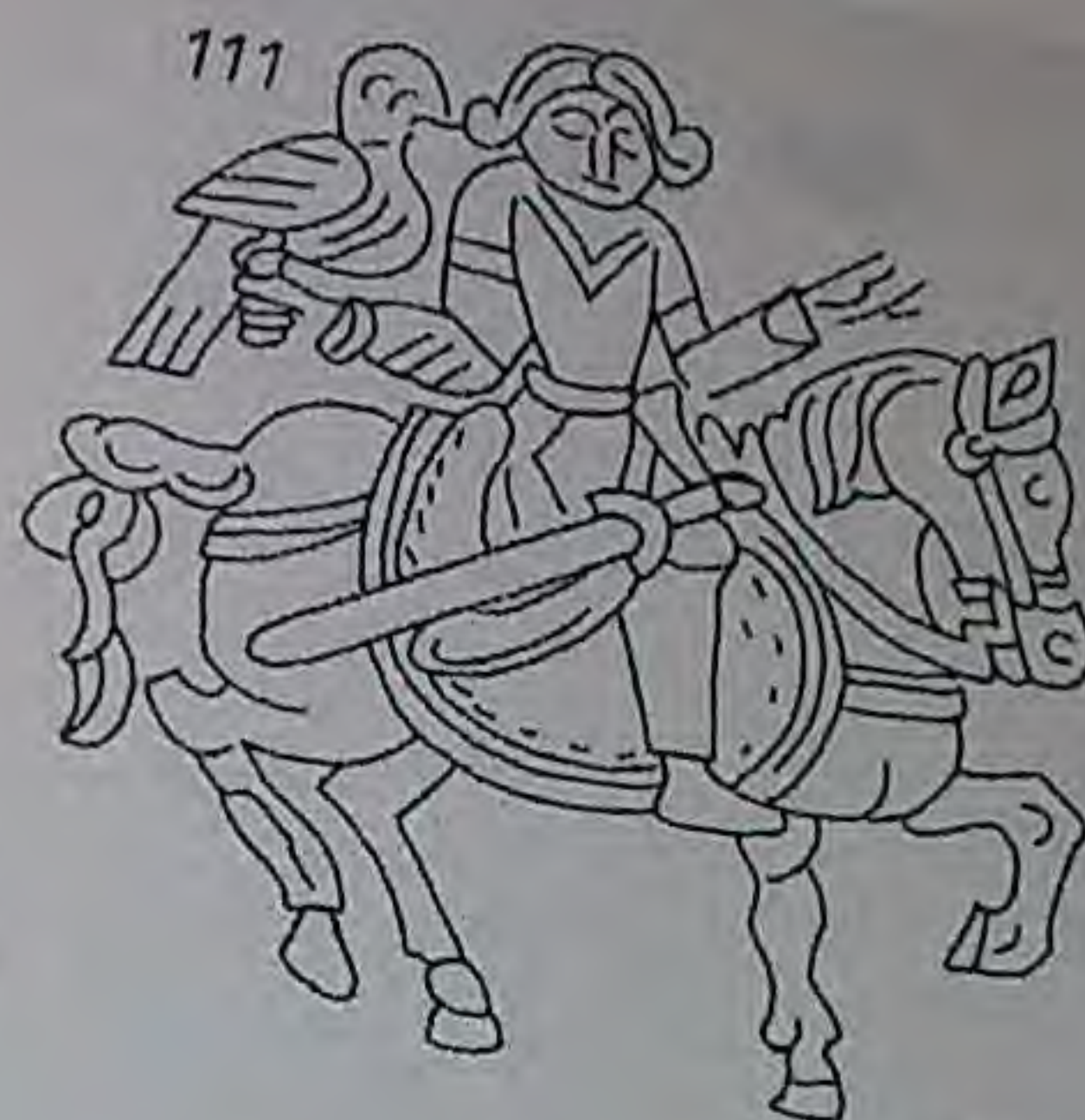
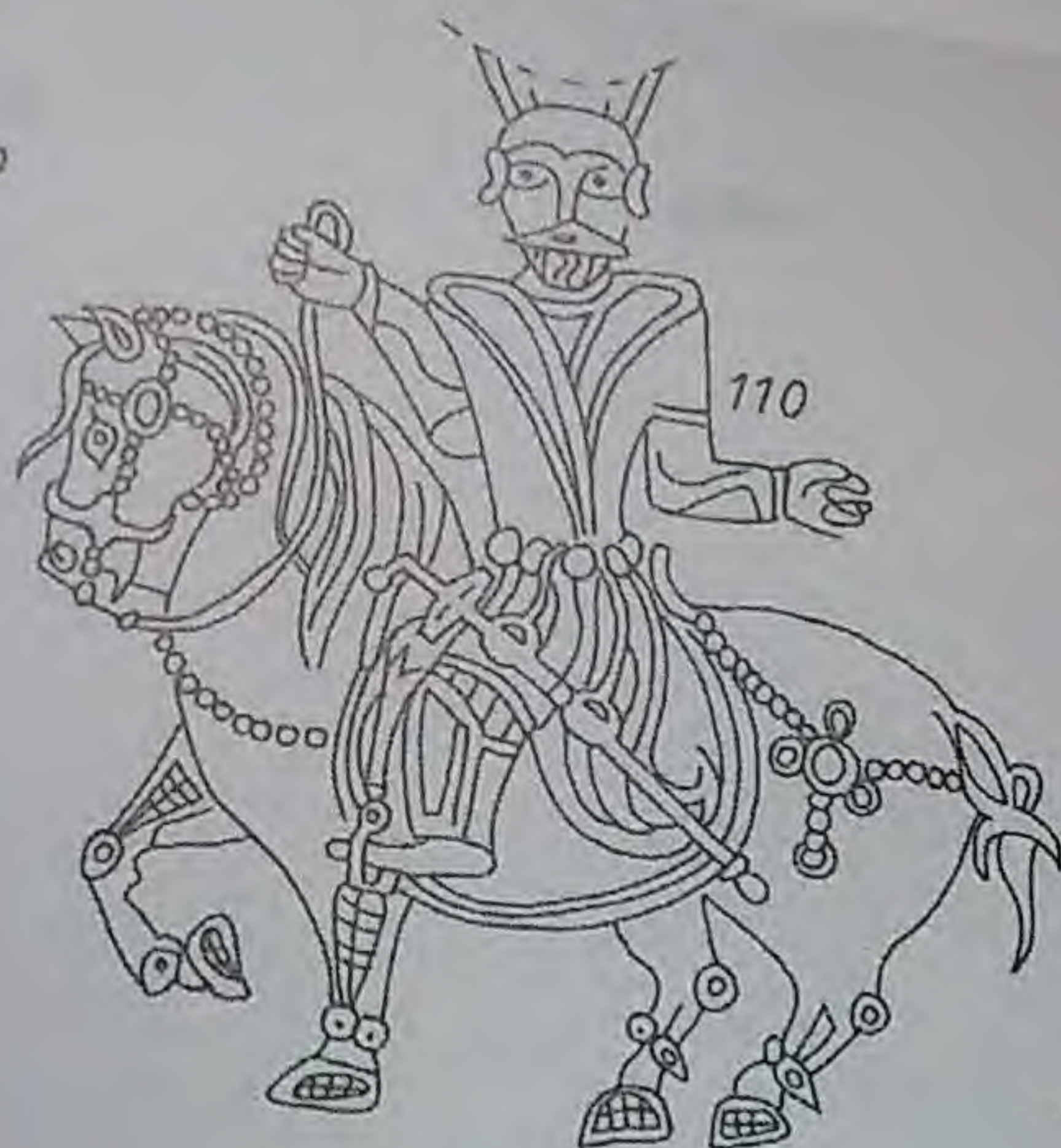


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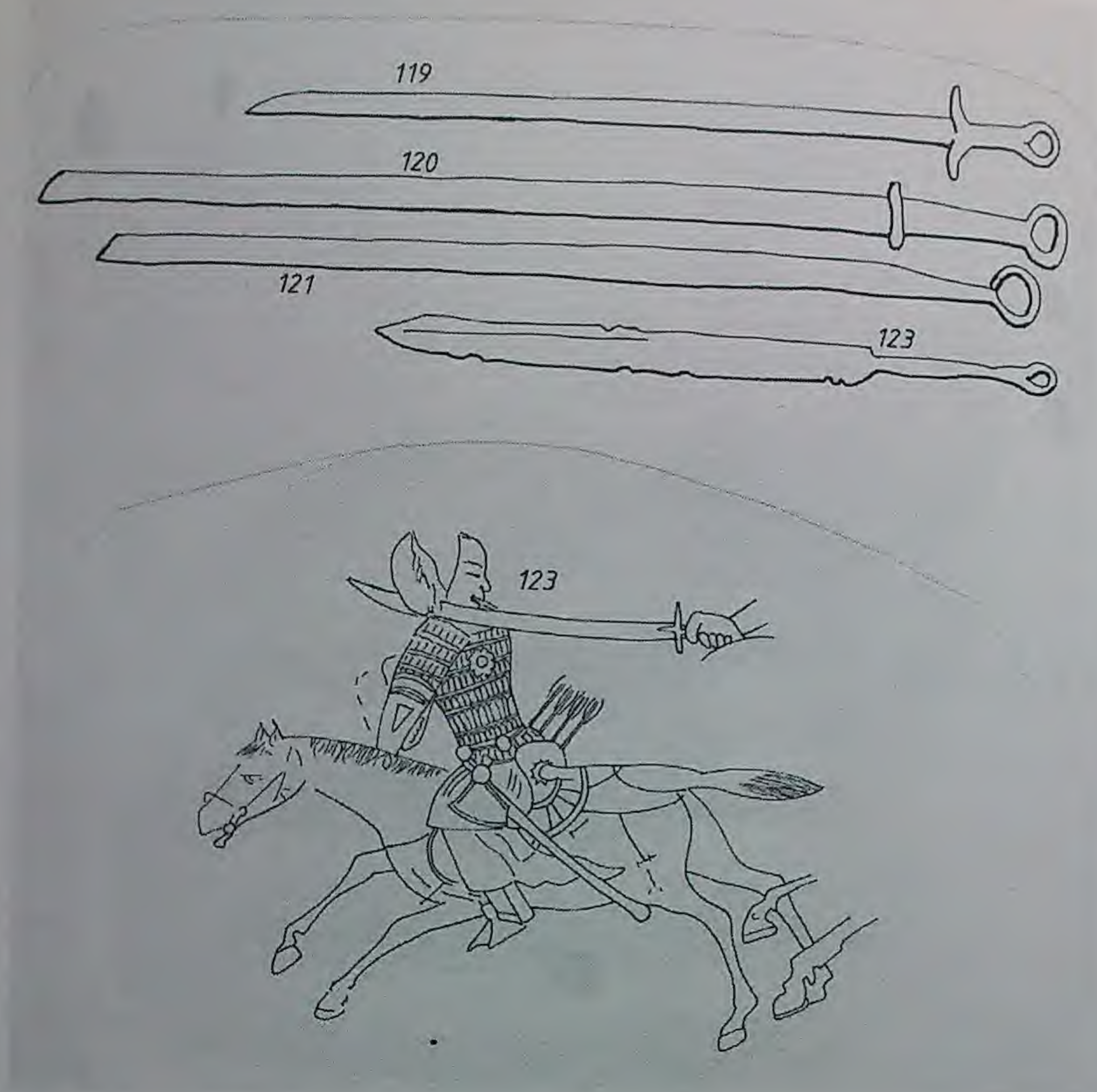


- XII-109 Sword carried by a red-faced camel-rider with a cloth band around his head on a wall-painting from Afrasiab, first/seventh or early second/eighth century. The scabbard is supported by an old-fashioned scabbard-slide (see also fig. XII-19). (Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand, Uzbekistan)
- XII-110 Gold medallion, believed to represent the Buwayhid prince 'Adūd al-Dawlah, western Iran or Iraq, late fourth/tenth century. (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, USA)
- XII-111 One of a pair of mirror-image pendants which originally formed part of a gold necklace, western Iran or Iraq, fourth/tenth century. (Art Museum, Cincinnati, inv. 1953.70, USA)
- XII-112 Part of a damaged carved stone relief from Nusaybin on the frontier between Turkey and Syria in south-eastern Anatolia, Saljūq, early seventh/thirteenth century. This lance-armed cavalryman clearly has another weapon thrust beneath his right leg and saddle. It is probably a sword and scabbard, though it might be a mace. (Archaeological Museum, no. IV.472, Ankara, Turkey)
- XII-113 The Persian *Warqa wa Gulshāh* manuscript probably dates from the late sixth/twelfth or early seventh/thirteenth century and is likely to have been made in western Iran, Azerbaijan or eastern Turkey. In this illustration of 'Warqa discussing with his father', the scabbard or holder for a substantial weapon is clearly visible beneath the saddle-flap of a riderless horse. It was probably for a so-called 'saddle sword'. (Topkapi Library, Ms. Haz. 841, f. 3/6a, Istanbul)
- XII-114 a-b Many of the more damaged and fragmentary wall-paintings from Pendzhikent in Transoxania remain unpublished. Some must date from around the time of the Arab-Islamic invasion of Transoxania early in the second/eighth century since they clearly portray early Islamic Arab soldiers. At least two of the latter carry swords whose distinctive hilts are shown in this sketch. (After sketches given to D. Nicolle by B.I. Marshak)
- XII-115 Bronze cylinder excavated at Qaryat al-Faw, capital of the Kinda tribe in pre-Islamic Arabia, first to fifth century AD. The similarity between this object and the grip of the sword found in an Islamic shipwreck off the south-western coast of Turkey is remarkable (see fig. XII-39). (King Saud University Museum, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)
- XII-116 The iron guard or quillons from what was almost certainly a straight double-edged sword were found at al-Rabadhah, a way-station on the Pilgrim Road from Iraq to Mecca. It probably dates from the second/eighth or third/ninth century. The blade which would have gone inside the sleeve below the guard would have been roughly 5cm across. (King Saud University Museum, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)
- XII-117 A gold coin of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Muqtadir, 295/908 to 320/932, shows the Caliph with a long straight sword which appears to have a crescent-shaped pommel (see also fig. XII-25). (Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett, Berlin; lost during World War II)
- XII-118 Decoration from a lustre-ware ceramic dish in the form of a turbaned horseman with a small round shield and a straight non-tapering sword (the apparent slight curvature in this drawing is a result of the shape of the bowl). The pommel of this broad sword appears to be in the form of a ring, perhaps with some additional decoration. (Private collection)









- XII-119 A single-edged sword found in a Turkish grave in the southern Urals region of what is now the Russian Federation, first to fifth century AD. The tang ends with a ring which served as a pommel. The quillons are forged as an integral part of this weapon. (After Yu.S. Khudyakov, *Voorukhenie Srednevekovuikh Kochevnikov Yuzhnoi Sibiri I Tsentralnoi Asii* [Novo Sibirsk, 1986])
- XII-120 Single-edged sword with an angled tip, found in a Turkish or Ugrian grave in western Siberia in what is now the Russian Federation, sixth to eighth century AD. This time the tang ends with a ring which serves as a pommel but the quillons are a separate item. (After A.I. Solovyev, *Voennoe Delo Kopennogo Naceleniya Zapadnoi Sibiri* [Novo Sibirsk, 1987])
- XII-121 A single-edged sword with an angled tip, found in a Turkish or Ugrian grave in western Siberia in what is now the Russian Federation, sixth to eighth century AD. The pommel again consists of a ring, this time clearly formed by bending the end of the very long tang into a circle. The separate quillons are, however, missing. (After A.I. Solovyev, *Voennoe Delo Kopennogo Naceleniya Zapadnoi Sibiri* [Novo Sibirsk, 1987])
- XII-122 A very unusual form of single-edged short sword or large dagger with a pommel in the form of teardrop ring. It was found in the ruins of the upper city of Vitoria in northern Spain and is believed to date from the sixth/twelfth century. Whether or not it reflects some influence from the Islamic regions of al-Andalus to the south is unknown. (Alava Museum, Vitoria)
- XII-123 Painted isolated manuscript page, probably from a copy of the *Shāhnāmah*, Iran, early ninth/fifteenth century. This rather gruesome scene is of interest because it provides a rare and clear illustration of a substantial war-axe hung from a horseman's belt. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England)